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The saint indeed ; and, The
touchstone of sincerity











— Engraved on Steel by Thomas Stagg —

REV. JOHN FLAVEL.

PRINTED BY WILLIAM TAYLOR, LONDON.

THE
SAINT INDEED,
AND THE
TOUCHSTONE OF SINCERITY.

BY THE
REV. JOHN FLAVEL.

WITH
AN INTRODUCTORY ESSAY,

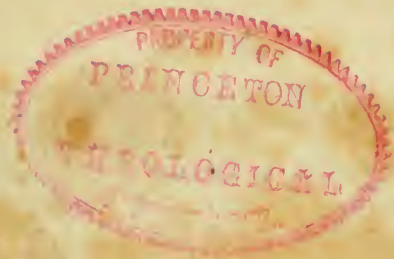
BY THE
REV. DAVID YOUNG,
PERTH.

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INTRODUCTORY ESSAY.

THERE are some men whose characters are best forgotten when you sit down to peruse their writings; there are others whose lives are a happy enforcement of every thing which drops from their pens. Of this latter class was JOHN FLAVEL, the author of the two searching performances which we now give anew to the public. There is no exaggeration in describing him as a master in the science of Theology, learned and acute in controversy, assiduous in the acquisition, and skilful in the use of a large store of general information, and gifted with an eloquence at once polished and impressive, simple and seraphic, which must have infused a peculiar charm into his oral instructions. These, however, are but secondary qualities, although highly subservient to the Christian ministry. They are descriptive of the head rather than of the heart, and where nothing more can be predicated, there remains a great and dismal deficiency in the portraiture of the man of God. In the portraiture of Flavel there was no such deficiency, but a conspicuous assemblage of Christian virtues, which merged the

distinctions of his learning and eloquence in the richer excellencies of his heart. His mind was so deeply imbued with the Gospel, as a matter of transcendent importance, and the theme of his daily contemplative delight, that preaching it in all its sufficiency to the perishing multitudes around him, was essential to the comfort of his earthly existence. Of him it may be said, with very peculiar emphasis, that the spirit of the Gospel caught him away from every engrossing secular concern, moulding his mind into its own fashion, and separating his faculties to its own service, with a strength of purpose and fervour of devotion, which are seldom equalled and rarely surpassed by the most distinguished heralds of the cross. In chastened zeal and singleness of aim, his mind was truly apostolic, converting duty into privilege, and labour into conscious pleasure, amidst great diversity of trial and difficulty. The times in which he lived were times of trouble; but his manner of life when involved in trouble, the loss of emolument, to which he submitted for the sake of a good conscience, and the personal hazard which he fearlessly incurred in the prosecution of his ministry, are evidence not to be questioned, that although he could preach without a living, he could not live without preaching. It is this happy affinity with the Gospel, as something identified with his very nature, which gave to his writings that ease and artlessness, and free access to the sympathies of his reader, with which they are every where characterized, and reveals the secret of that plastic influence, which made his mind to bend to his subject, and not his subject to his mind, in all his intercourse with Christian truth.

Flavel, however, was very far from being a mere *Evangelical*, in the sense imposed on that term by the flippancy of modern sarcasm. It is true he considered the sovereignty of grace, and the entire moral inability of man, as doctrines absolutely fundamental to accurate views of the Christian system; but, like all who are enlightenedly evangelical, he was also a Christian moralist of the very highest order, unfolding the principles of true morality, in the sublime of their heavenly origin, and enforcing obedience to its precepts without abatement or compromise, as the best of all evidence of genuine religion. Nor was he merely a *teacher* of morality, but a living example of his own instructions. What he enjoined he sedulously practised, and what he prohibited he studiously shunned—thus commending a life of holiness as a matter of personal experience, and requiring nothing of any one, but merely to walk along with him in the paths of Christian righteousness.

The two things, perhaps, for which Flavel was most remarkable, are mature and extensive experience of Christianity as a matter of personal exercise, and a strong propensity to Christian good-doing, excited by a peculiar sweetness and benevolence of disposition. The first of these, combined with the vigour and soundness of his understanding, made him eminently skilful in analyzing the religion of the heart. He carefully studied his own heart in all its varied phenomena, and this afforded him wonderful facilities in directing others to the study of theirs; for “as face answereth to face in a glass, so doth the heart of man to man.” If we except the peerless “*Edwards on Religious Affections*,” a work which is tacitly ex-

cluded from all our ordinary comparisons, we know not another writer whose accuracy in detecting false experience, and rescuing the true from dubious alliance, is more to be relied on than that of Flavel. Our opinion may be overstrained, and we own it is connected with early impressions; but we cannot easily suppress it, and are pretty confident of support to it from the majority of competent judges. The second peculiarity to which we have adverted was a happy concomitant of this one, combining the warmth of a generous heart with the seeming severity of a rigid dissection, and pouring the oil of the tenderest sympathy into the wounds which his faithfulness inflicted. Such is a sketch of the celebrated Flavel; and if the reader shall carry it along with him in perusing the following pages, he may see it in every series of sentiment, and feel the weight of his heavenly character giving special effect to his practical conclusions.

‘The Saint Indeed,’ and ‘The Touchstone of Sincerity,’ are perhaps the best of Flavel’s writings, so far as the religion of the heart is concerned; and they are both so plain and practical, that a child may easily understand them, while the man of intellect and acquirement will find them well entitled to his most serious perusal. It is the leading proposition of ‘The Saint Indeed,’ “that the keeping and right managing of the heart in every condition, is the great business of the Christian’s life;” and the Author, in illustrating this proposition, explains what is meant by “keeping the heart”—vindicates the claim of this exercise to the Christian’s chief attention—specifies seasons and circumstances which render it

peculiarly necessary—and urges the whole on the reader's attention by a series of appropriate deductions. These things he prosecutes with an ease of conception, an accuracy of discrimination, and persuasive warmth of affectionate appeal, which cannot fail to be gratefully instructive to all who have any acquaintance with religion as a matter of experience. Our hope of good from this part of the volume, however, goes beyond the edification of those who have already commenced the business of religion. We do think it better fitted than many more elaborate performances, for arresting the frivolous and profane, and inclining even *their* hearts to the pure and peaceable wisdom which cometh from above. Its judicious selection of matter, its uniform brevity of parts, its dignified simplicity, its plain dealing, but above all, its latent power of gentle and hallowed persuasion, are the likeliest of all human means for enticing the thoughtless to think of religion as a very solemn reality.

An instance of its triumphs in this respect has been kept on authentic record, which is so encouraging in itself, and so corroborative of the opinion just expressed, that we cannot refrain from giving it entire.* Mr. Flavel being in London in 1673, his old bookseller, Mr. Boulter, gave him this following relation, namely,—“ That some time before, there came into his shop a sparkish gentleman, to inquire for some play-books; Mr. Boulter told him he had none, but showed him Mr. Flavel's little Trea-

* We quote from a short Life of Flavel, prefixed to a folio edition of his Works, printed at Glasgow in 1751.

tise of *Keeping the Heart*," ('The Saint Indeed,') "and entreated him to read it, assuring him it would do him more good than play-books. The gentleman read the title; and glancing upon several pages here and there, broke out into these and such other expressions:—What a damnable fanatic was he that made this book?—Mr. Boulter begged of him to buy and read it; and told him he had no cause to censure it so bitterly: at last he bought it, but told him he would not read it. What will ye do with it then? said Mr. Boulter. I will tear and burn it, said he, and send it to the devil. Mr. Boulter told him, then he should not have it. Upon this, the gentleman promised to read it; and Mr. Boulter told him, if he disliked it upon reading, he would return him his money. About a month after, the gentleman coming to the shop again, in a very modest habit and serious countenance, bespeaks Mr. Boulter thus:—Sir, I most heartily thank you for putting this book into my hands; I bless God that moved you to do it; it hath saved my soul: blessed be God that ever I came into your shop. And then he bought a hundred more of those books of him, told him he would give them to the poor who could not buy them, and so left him, praising and admiring the goodness of God. Thus it pleased God to bless the sermons and writings of Mr. Flavel."

'The Touchstone of Sincerity' is not less instructive, but far more searching than 'The Saint Indeed,' and forms a very appropriate sequel to the impression which its precursor is fitted to produce. Its leading subjects of consideration are three in number, namely,—that professors of religion in

general, are in very great danger of mistaking what they are in the sight of God,—that the saving grace of the Gospel is exceedingly precious, and greatly enriches the soul which possesses it,—and that no man's religion can be called genuine, unless it is able, upon the whole, to surmount the trials to which it is subjected in this world. To these three considerations, which are matter of deep and solemn interest to every professor of Christianity; and in the discussion of which, the prevailing evil of our own times is but too faithfully delineated, the Author subjoins a series of tests by which the state of the heart, in relation to religion, may be distinctly ascertained, and which are the more useful, that in general they are applicable not to rare emergencies in the course of the Christian life, but to the ordinary circumstances in which professors are placed. They are connected with the Christian's *carriage* under prosperity, which assails the heart in one direction, and under adversity, which assails it in another—the treatment which he gives to his indwelling corruption—the spirit by which he is actuated in religious duties—and the way in which his heart is affected when the claims of religion come to compete with his dearest earthly ties and tendencies. This is followed up by a detail, at once judicious and consolatory, of the gracious ends which God has in view in subjecting true religion to such severity of trial in this world—an enumeration of the reasons why that religion, which has stood the test, is alone to be depended on in prospect of the final decision—a practical digest of the whole treatise—and a most important caveat against those mistakes in judging of themselves, to which the peni-

tent are liable on the one extreme, and the impenitent on the other. The discerning reader will at once perceive, that these are topics, if any such there be in the whole range of Christian discussion, which require the steadiness of a skilful hand to manage them to purpose. He will perceive also, on perusing the Treatise, if he has not perused it already, that its Author knew the true medium between that dry and heartless frigidity which scouts experience on the one extreme, and that distempered sentimentality which depraves it on the other.

If we are asked to specify the summary benefit which the reader may fairly promise himself from the religious use of this volume, we have no hesitation in replying, that he is either a very obdurate, or a very spiritual man, if it does not put him out of patience with his present amount of religious attainment, and inspire him with a new and restless desire for greater nearness to God in the habitual condition of his mind, than he has ever yet experienced. This we take to be its leading and characteristic tendency. Nor is it merely fitted to produce this desire in a mind in any measure seasoned for the subject; but, taking its Treatises together, it furnishes an invaluable series of means, warranted and sanctified by the Word of God, for carrying the desire out to an abundant gratification. Every thing, however, for a profitable perusal of the volume, depends on the reader's estimate of the benefit we have specified. If nearness to God be trivial in his eyes, the volume will also be trivial; but if he judges this to be a precious attainment, in exactly the same proportion will the volume rise in his esteem. Now, for the sake of

bringing him to an elevated estimate of this attainment, and thus enabling him to reap the benefit which is here offered to his acceptance, we solicit the reader's wakeful attention to the few following considerations :—

I. Nearness to God in the habitual condition of your mind, will establish your confidence in godliness as a reality. Although the term *godliness*, in the Christian vocabulary, conveys a very distinct idea ; and although the thing of which it is the name is known to be a solemn and blessed reality, by every genuine disciple of the cross—there is yet an approach to scepticism about it, not avowed, but latent and practical, among many professors of Christianity. And could we get them to speak out, they would tell us, in plain language, that although they have waited on God in the institutions of his grace, perhaps for many years, they have never found these institutions to be any thing better to them than wells without water, or clouds without rain. The force of custom, or the workings of a slavish conscience, has kept them toiling on in the duties of religion ; but they have felt no interest, no growing spirituality, no decided religious enjoyment, and nothing but fear prevents them from saying, “ Why should we wait for the Lord any longer ? ” The tendency of the whole process, so far as they are concerned, is towards the dark and hideous void of atheism itself. Nor do we wonder at this, for we know not of any thing which is better fitted to destroy belief in the existence of God, than perusing the record which speaks of his love, and frequenting the services where

he is said to be found, without ever finding him there. This state of mind is exceedingly distressing to those who have any ingenuous concern about their eternal well-being; but it is also exceedingly dangerous, and is often the forerunner of a final apostacy from the very profession of the Gospel. The cause of it, however, is easily assigned. The persons who answer to the above description, never did observe a Christian institution, during the whole course of their lives, in the true spirit of that institution. It is the letter which killeth, and not the spirit which giveth life, with which alone they have had to do. Their bodies may have been near to God in external appearance, or their lips in the utterance of devotional sentiment, but their hearts were still at a moral distance; and since godliness is exclusively a matter of experience, they cannot testify to its truth or its excellence, because they have never so much as entered the hallowed region where its influence is felt.

This is no gratuitous assertion, which they are shut up to take at our word; for if they look at the character of God as described in his own revelation, and consider the nature of that communion which he must maintain with reasonable beings, when he chooses to commune with them at all, they will see it undeniable, that in all their intermeddlings with religious things, they have been in a state of alienation from God; that although he was "near in their mouths," yet, by an inward moral repellency of which they were conscious, and which was the matter of their own choice, he was kept "far from their reins." If this, then, be the cause of the evil, the cure is easily pointed out. They must come near to God,

not merely in external Christian observance, or intellectual intercourse with religious truth, but in that sense which corresponds with his character, and with the nature of that intercourse which it befits him to hold with creatures of his hand, situated as they are situated, and under such a dispensation of his goodness as that which is addressed to them. Without this there can be no approach unto God; and where there is no approach to him, there can be no means of ascertaining whether he does or does not reward his genuine worshippers with the tokens of his loving-kindness. To the question, what is it to draw near to him in that way which befits his character and our condition in relation to him? the reply is brief and obvious. It is not merely to admit the evidence which points him out to our contemplation, for bare admission is a negative thing, and leaves a man morally as far away as it found him; but it is positively to believe in him in terms of his own explicit revelation. And to believe in him; is to have our spirits lifted up to a moral harmony with his Spirit—to look at him steadily in the attested truth of his Being and Godhead—to behold him in his manifestation of himself to us, as the God of our salvation in Jesus Christ—to feel him actually dealing with us as a father deals with his children, in instruction or reproof, or more direct expressions of his fatherly good-will,—and, as a result of all this, to have our souls powerfully actuated to that filial obedience, and those adoring exercises, which such a disclosure of him is fitted to produce.

This is what it is to draw near to God;—and leaving our Author to tell you, in his own happy

way, in what this exercise originates, and how it is maintained, we go on to remark, that the exercise may be painful, or it may be pleasurable, as unerring Wisdom directs, and your necessities require; it may raise your heart to the ecstasies of love, or sink it down to the depths of contrition, or exemplify a very profitable mixture of both these extremes: but whatever may be the case as to these things, it cannot fail to produce a conviction, that godliness is no phantasm, but a very solemn spiritual reality. In other circumstances, you may have your doubts whether there be any thing in it or not; but here it is as impossible to doubt, as to question your own identity, for this is the demonstration of the Spirit—a demonstration which originates in the nature of the effect produced—a matter of impression rather than of argument, and therefore not to be reasoned against—the touch, in short, of the Divinity himself, telling that he is there, and directing reason to her highest duty, the recognition of her God. This demonstration withal, is not in every case dependent on the consciousness of gracious acceptance with God, in those who are the subjects of it, for godliness has its terrors as well as its delights in the present state of its progress to perfection; and the man who fears he is not accepted, may be just as sure as his happier fellow, that, whether accepted or not, he is in the presence of God. Nor is the effect of this assurance confined to particular acts or seasons of fellowship, but goes down into the futurities of the man's existence, settling itself into principles, and forming itself into habits, which constitute his character and govern his life. Nay, it is usually more

impressive afterwards than in the meantime, so far at least as practical benefit is concerned, just as our estimate of an interesting conference with a friend or fellow-creature, is best matured or rectified after the excitement has subsided, and left us leisure for cool reflection. It was after Jacob awaked from his vision, and had calmly reviewed it, that he said—"Surely the Lord is in this place, and I knew it not."

Thus it is that gracious intercourse with God, whether amidst the delights of conscious acceptance, or under the depressions of contrition and sorrow, is not merely a means, but the only effective means of dissipating all dubiety, and completely establishing the great truth, that God does in very deed dwell with man upon the earth. We must commune with God, in order to be believers in godliness; for this is not a thing to be conjectured or argued from general principles, or taken on the testimony of mortals, it must be tasted in order to be felt in its formative influence on human character. But if it be a reality at all, it must be a reality of immense importance to every child of fallen Adam—a reality standing out in peerless pre-eminence above all his ordinary concerns, demanding his earliest and gravest attention, and attaching a very peculiar value to every thing which tends to its elucidation. But important as it is in itself, the interest with which we look at it is fearfully augmented by the broad and unquestionable fact, that it is forgotten, wantonly forgotten or depreciated, by immense multitudes, even at the risk of "eternal destruction from the presence of the Lord, and the glory of his power." Infidels and

formalists disown it, and just because they are infidels and formalists they cannot do less than disown it : for,

————— “ Of God above, or man below,
What *can* we reason, but from what we know ? ”

But Christians also have their share in this delinquency ; and their share is the most culpable, because they cannot plead the infidel’s excuse. They have had experience of communion with God, and know it to be a reality ; but there is a law in their members which is opposed to godliness, and wars against the law of their minds ; there is a law in this world opposed to it, to which they pay a most unchristian deference ; there is a law among themselves as matters stand at present, which enacts but a very low degree of inward Christianity, as sufficient to maintain their respectability : and, in obedience to these laws, they content themselves, as if by mutual consent, with a distance from the glorious presence of God in the prevailing habit of their minds, which allows the haze of this lower region to intercept its warming radiance, and leaves the plant of heaven within them, like a rare and delicate exotic, to languish in a chilling temperature which grievously obstructs its growth.

This is no exaggerated statement, but a sober image of the fact : and we ask you, ingenuous Christian reader, to decide on it for yourself. Is it, or is it not a most desirable thing, to have such an evil counteracted ? You know it is indeed exceedingly desirable, and you see in yourself a reason why it is so ; because, although it be the case that you are in

no danger of doubting or denying the point in question, you are aware it exerts not within you the efficacy which it ought to exert. It dwells not in your heart with the clearness, and constancy, and power, which, in your holiest moments, you earnestly desire ; and this you see to be the prevailing reason of your daily short-comings in practical holiness. It is a maxim with you, that nearness to God is nearness to religious truth ; not in the mere perception of it, but in its force, its divinity, its fulness of sanctifying influence : while distance from God is distance from religious truth, in all these points of view. Experience has taught you, that a doctrine of godliness detached from God, and far away from him, is cold and powerless as a distant star ; and although it may be seen as the star is seen in the clear sky of a winter's night, yet even when it is seen, and maintained, and defended, the heart may be cold towards God, and warm only towards sinful indulgence. This is the case in thousands of instances, where a Christian profession is zealous and noisy ; but where it is the amount of the man's attainment, he is as destitute of vital godliness as the confirmed infidel himself : for this plain reason, that the doctrines of godliness, apart from God, have no transitive vitality. They must be seen, not in the abstract, but *in God*, by a mind that is near to him, in order to produce their proper effect. This is the very end for which these doctrines were given ; they are the index of the Divinity to his fallen creatures, and to separate them from him is to separate the index from the object to which it points. The man who knows them aright, beholds in them, "as in a glass, the glory of the Lord ;

and is changed into the same image, from glory to glory, by the Spirit of the Lord."

Here, then, is a powerful reason why you should cultivate nearness to God, and prize the labours of of that instructor who opens up to you the true philosophy of this most interesting attainment. In proportion as the attainment is yours, you know what godliness really is; you are proof against practical scepticism about it; you feel it to be a matter of paramount importance; you are moved by an irrepressible desire for drinking deeper into its mystery; and you are mercifully delivered from those counterfeits of it, which are the ruin of many a modern professor.

II. The attainment in question will rectify your estimate of all terrestrial things. By terrestrial things we mean, not the pleasures of sin, or the gratification which sinners feel in what is sinful in itself, but the good things of providence, which are innocent in themselves, and which God permits his people to enjoy in common with others around them. These good things are the *gods of earthly-minded* men, and there is no wonder that they should adore them. But there is, perhaps, no one error which is more common even among Christians, than that of estimating these things far above their real value. The evidences of this are obvious, and meet us in many a different form. Look for a moment at wealth. Has a Christian acquired it? How readily does he plume himself on the acquisition; and, merely on account of it, look for deference, even in matters of opinion, from those who trudge in the walks of poverty! Has he

not acquired, but got it in prospect, as the likely reward of enterprise? To what tremendous hazard does he expose, not his comfort merely, but his health, or his conscience, or the eternal interests of himself and his family, in order to secure it! Has he acquired it, and lost it again by some of the nameless casualties to which treasure on earth is ever exposed? He is plunged at once into the deepest distress; and not even the power of religion, till aided by the lapse of time, can restore him to peace of mind. In all this, he is justified by the opinion which passes current among the men of this world; for although the mind and its moral treasure be the true criterion of *human* worth, yet they will consider him to be a man of weight, or a man of insignificance, according to the quantity of the dust of the ground, in some one or other of its modifications, which happens to cleave to him as his property, or to remain at the disposal of his will. But you have only to look at wealth and mental acquirement, even in the general light of revelation, in order to perceive at once that the former is greatly over-rated; and could not, in fact, have the power either to elevate or depress a Christian, in the manner above described, but for a most egregious fallacy in the principle on which it is estimated. For although this same wealth be a good thing—although it possesses a real worth, inasmuch as it is the creature of God, and may be rendered very serviceable to his cause in this world; yet it is a thing of time, and confined to time, while man is destined for eternity. It has no natural or necessary connection with his preparation for eternity; it cannot yield him adequate enjoyment even in this world, nor can it give

him any security for the temporal comfort of his children after him; it is certainly connected, in short, with no moral good, and is sure to be the occasion of much moral injury, except to the man who is decidedly a Christian, and thus enabled to make a Christian use of it: and if this be a true account of it, there cannot, in reality, be any thing about it which entitles it to be the means of producing any one of the states of mind to which we have adverted. Wealth, however, is but one of the things to which we refer in this particular; although it is perhaps the most insnaring, not only to the Christian, but also to those who are still in their sins. There is honour, there is recreation, there is concern about bodily health, there is merely intellectual endowment, there is the cultivation of taste, there is domestic and relative comfort, with a nameless variety of other things, every one of which is greatly overrated, even by those whose treasure is in heaven. Objects of sense have a charm about them, which is partly explicable, and partly not; but which often gives them a hold of our hearts, of which we have scarcely any conception, till the hour of trial puts us to the test.

If this error were generally harmless, or not seriously detrimental, or if it were productive of a mixed effect, which is partly profitable and partly the reverse, there would be little reason to deplore it. This, however, is far from being its character. It is radically a bad thing, an unmixed and entire evil, as injurious to the Christian life as it is prevalent among Christian professors. If your estimate of the good things of this life be just, that estimate does more than simply keep them from doing you injury; it has

a positive tendency to promote your Christianity : but if your estimate of them be unjust, if you err here at all on the one side or on the other, the result is certain retardation to your Christian prosperity. The good creatures of God are to be religiously used : but it is truth, and not error, in thinking of providence as well as of revelation ; it is justness of conception, and not mere fondness on the one extreme, or antipathy on the other, which is the basis of piety. So far, then, as your delight in any earthly good thing is excessive or inordinate, you are clearly guilty of transferring to the creature a portion of that regard which is due to the Creator ; you approximate, in short, to that state of mind which the Bible describes as worshipping and serving the creature more than the Creator, who is blessed for ever. The slightest excess, arising as it does from depraved affection, is incipient idolatry. This is the conclusion to which we are infallibly conducted ; and oh, it is your interest, as well as your duty, to ponder it deeply ! for it holds true, however good, or desirable, or tenderly attractive the object of excess may be. It may not be a thing which is positively sinful ; it may not be so coarse and vulgar a good as the wealth or pleasures of this world. It may be the wife of your bosom, and she a paragon of Christian virtue—or the loveliest fruit of your body—or the truest and most estimable of all your earthly associates ; but if even to these your heart be turned to excess, in exactly the same proportion is it drawn away from God. This is the true nature of the error in itself and its consequences ; it is just putting the creature in the place of the Creator : and because it consists not merely in making a god of that which is no

God; but in doing this speciously, by the deification of a positive good, and without the absurdity of graven imagery—it is of all other errors the most difficult of cure. But if this be a fair account of the error; if it be subtile, and plausible, and diversified in its workings; if it has wrought itself into general prevalence even among the people of God; if every one of them, in ordinary circumstances, is certainly infected with it in one form or other; if it cleaves to them like a burden of earth, and lies oppressively heavy on the inward springs of piety, in the closet, in the family, in the assemblies of the saints, as well as in all the intercourse of ordinary Christian life; if it be more inveterate withal, than any other plague of the heart—then surely the aggregate of its injurious effects must be tremendous, and that must be a transcendent good which tends to its removal.

This good is nearness to God, the Bible itself being witness. Asaph found it so, when about to sink amidst the quicksands of sceptical surmising. He saw the men who made a god of this world apparently blessed with unbounded prosperity, as the fruit of their irreligion; but after examining their course of life, and patiently tracing it to its end, he gave his verdict concerning it in the following memorable words: “Surely thou didst set them in slippery places; thou castedst them down into destruction. How are they brought into desolation as in a moment! they are utterly consumed with terrors. As a dream when one awaketh; so, O Lord, when thou awakest, thou shalt despise their image.” But where was Asaph when he spake thus? He was in the sanctuary of his God; that is to say, he was near to God

in holy and reverend intercourse with him. It was there that the mystery of providence, which before had staggered his confidence in God, was explained to his satisfaction; and it was there also that his difficulties were removed, his errors rectified, and his soul delivered from all its perplexities. But as if to make sure of this by a full and varied experiment, he adopted a very different method before he was led to this one. He, first of all, took up a position far away from God's sanctuary, and looked from thence at the worshippers of mammon; but what was the result?—Why, all around him was darkness and confusion, his mind was unsettled in its firmest convictions, and almost driven away into the madness of atheism. He found no solution of the problem of providence, no rest for the sole of his foot amidst the waters of uncertainty, till he altered his course and came near to his God, and then he found tranquillity because he found truth.

But what was the truth which he found there? It was not that the temporal prosperity of the wicked was no temporal prosperity, or that they were poor, despised, and friendless, while he supposed them to be rich and respectable; for in reference to these things he was in no error, and had no call to change his opinions. But the truth which burst upon his view, consisted in a rectified estimate of these men's prosperity, or of the intrinsic or relative value of the temporal good things which God permitted them to enjoy. Formerly, these things were so high in his esteem, that he considered the affluent possession of them to be a sure index of divine approbation, and was thus led to question the reality of God's un-

changing delight in those who fear him and work righteousness. Now he saw that this was a capital error, that God's estimate of temporal prosperity is so different from man's, that he makes it no index of his moral attributes, nor any sure token of his special favour in the present state of things, but accounts it a common thing, and gives it indiscriminately to the righteous and the wicked, or often in judgment, makes it a snare, in which the latter are caught to their destruction. This is the truth which he found in the sanctuary—a truth, which revealed the degrading sophistry of his former mode of reasoning, which brought him to himself again, which effectually broke the charm in which temptation had bound him, and led him to say, with shame and contrition, “It is good for me to draw near to God.”

Now, his moral position in relation to God, or the state and exercise of his mind, as breathing the air of the heavenly sanctuary, were exceedingly favourable to this discovery. His soul was elevated to the only standing, and pervaded by the only element which can enable a human being, on this side the grave, to judge correctly of things below. Much, it is obvious, depends on position and accurate relative knowledge, for estimating the magnitude of objects on the surface of the earth. The boy who has been born in an isolated hamlet, and has scarcely ever crossed its precincts since the time of his birth, attaches to its form and outlay an interest and a greatness which are exceedingly wide of the truth. But let him be transported to the summit of a neighbouring mountain, where a spacious country opens around him, with its clustering fields, and towns, and villages,

and in an instant his views are rectified, his favourite hamlet sinks before him into comparative insignificance, and he is lost in delightful amazement at the cure of his former misconceptions. So is it with the Christian who escapes from the contracting influence of this bewitching world, and ascends the mountain of fellowship with God. His range of vision is exceedingly widened, and the mists of prejudice are put to flight; he feels himself above the world, and can afford to think of it with the independence of a judge; the sublime of heaven expands before him, and reveals below the littleness of earth; his mind is cured of its grovelling propensities, and ceases to be bounded by that which is sordid; his moral taste is enlightened and purified, and capable of appreciating spiritual excellence: his native love of immortality, in short, is awakened into new vigour, and soars to that which is incorruptible. This may be strange to the "carnally minded," but they who have felt the power of religion, will readily recognize it as a matter of experience. You may, perhaps, remember the time when some desirable earthly good emerged to your view in glowing attraction, inviting your instant pursuit, and promising to reward your efforts with a large harvest of enjoyment. You were caught in the snare of its plausible appearances, and planned, and toiled, and struggled after it, till religion was lost to your view, like the eagle in the distant cloud. But a season of calm reflection arrived, and placed you alone in the presence of God, with the spiritual world, and its high concerns again disclosed to your view. And what a revolution did this produce in your view of the good in question? The

spell which bound you down to earth was broken in an instant; you felt as if awakened from an abominable dream; and, like the storied wanderer, lured from his path by the song of the fabled Siren, you hastened to secure your retreat from the region of spiritual destruction. The cause of this delusion was distance from God, and the deliverance from it was nearness to him. But, alas! how many dreamers are there whom no season of reflection ever awakes. “They know not, neither will they understand; they walk on in darkness;” pursuing the fatuous inanities which hover around this lower world, but never lifting a steady eye to the region of eternal blessedness.

III. It will fortify your mind against the temptations of your great spiritual adversary. No one who believes the Bible, or has any pretension to self-knowledge, will venture to deny, that exposure to temptation is the common lot of all Christians, so long as they live in this world. Every one of them, whether high or low, enlightened or unenlightened, hid in the seclusion of a solitary home, or busy on the theatre of active life, is liable to its inroads in one form or other. The present state of the church, or of the Christian mind within the church, is the scene where temptation has scope, and is prosecuted with incessant activity. The present, indeed, is the only scene where it can annoy the heir of immortality, for into the land of uprightness it cannot enter; and here it is plied with the keenest persistence, because here alone is its opportunity. The arch-deceiver is Satan himself, the ancient and formidable enemy of man, who conceals himself under false ap-

pearances, and employs a multitude of agents and instruments to aid his malicious designs. His modes of working too, are exceedingly diversified—adapted with deep and cruel sagacity to favourable times and seasons, to constitutions and tempers, to local or relative circumstances, and even to novel and disconcerting incidents in the course of a Christian's life. Not only does he work “with all deceivableness of unrighteousness in them that perish,” but he assails the church of the living God—sometimes fomenting evils which slowly affect her as a whole, but always managing separate devices against every family and individual who has been brought within her pale. There are many professors of Christianity who seem to be scarcely conscious that this *destroyer* exists; and although they are constrained to admit that religion is low in their hearts and characters, they give themselves little concern, and have seldom any apprehension of *his* agency in the matter. Mere shortcoming in heart or conduct, and many acts of positive transgression, they ascribe exclusively to human infirmity, and never think of Satanic influence, except when something enormous occurs, which cannot be easily traced to the ordinary working of evil propensity.

This, be assured, is a ruinous delusion, the deadliest effect of the very cause which it so successfully keeps in concealment. Could we analyze the phenomena of morals as easily as an object of sense; and trace our ordinary sinful volitions, not merely to the heart, but back to the subtle and secret agency which actually gave them existence there; we should see that even the renovated man, who is not now of his father the devil, but become a child of God, is snared

into all his inconsistencies, more or less directly, by the artifice of this relentless adversary. The artifice too, as practised on him, is necessarily more refined than in the case of the unrenewed, for he is possessed of a spiritual discernment, which chooses the good and rejects the evil, in conduct as well as enjoyment; and this discernment must be stupified, or bewildered by false appearances, before he can be led to the commission of sin. It is these false appearances which give the tempter all his power. To the children of darkness he may freely show himself without exciting any suspicion, for he is their father, the “prince of darkness;” and children are usually not alarmed at seeing their father just as he is. But when he approaches the children of light, he must be transformed into an angel of light, or at least conceal his real designs, to prevent them from instantly taking alarm, and preparing themselves for vigorous resistance. Thus it is, in multitudes of instances, that Christians live without fear, and think themselves guided by their own discretion, or only tasting of licensed indulgence, when, in fact, they are led by his counsel, and made the victims of his devices.

We know that the inexperienced are slow to believe a doctrine like this, and may occasionally be tempted to smile at the solicitude of others on their account. But let them examine their own hearts, and the ever-shifting phenomena around them—let them look at the havoc which is often carried into a single Christian congregation—in the destruction of character, and purity, and peace; and the production of guilt, remorse, and shame, where appearances before were highly auspicious;—let them, judging from

what they know of that which they do not know, endeavour to take a survey of the whole Christian community at any one time, and look at the miserable wrecks of temptation, in the inconsistencies, feuds and falls, which are ever occurring among the best of men; with the agonies of guilt on the one hand, and the holy heart-breakings of wounded godliness on the other; and they will see a power in this engine of evil, sufficient to agitate the firmest among them. It was this which troubled the mind of an apostle, and imbittered the pure celestial joy with which he contemplated the church at Corinth: "I am jealous over you with a godly jealousy, lest by any means, as the serpent beguiled Eve through his subtlety, so your minds should be corrupted from the simplicity which is in Christ." Nor was the danger peculiar to Corinth, but general among the churches, for he addresses the churches every where on the same subject; and to none of them does he speak of it in stronger language than to the saints at Ephesus, even at the time of their high prosperity: "Put on the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places."

Such is the mind of an apostle on this most interesting subject; and no one can question, that protection from the power of so awful an adversary, so far as that is possible in the present state of imperfection, is a most desirable Christian attainment. But it is scarcely necessary to say, that your only way to this attainment, is a deeply wrought and

steady habit of nearness to God in the frame of your mind. It is not any thing without you, either in the power or policy of Satan, or in the attractions of forbidden pleasure, but what is within you, or the state of your heart, which constitutes your chief exposure to danger. "The prince of this world cometh and hath nothing in me," was the saying of your Saviour on the scene of temptation, and this was one of the grand preservatives which made him invincible to Satan's assaults. These words, however, you cannot appropriate, for your state of mind disowns their import. The tempter finds in you much that is his own; and because it is his own it claims relation to him, and is ever ready to yield him access to your hearts and your springs of action. But if it be true, in reference to the body, that your best means of protection from any one physical influence, is to arm yourselves with its opposite—it is equally true, in reference to the mind, and in this particular instance, that your best means of protection from the influence of Satan, is to put on the armour of eminent piety. Of all beings in the moral universe, none are so decidedly opposites, as "the high and lofty One that inhabiteth eternity, whose" very "name is holy," and the prince of the fallen spirits: and the man who is morally nearest to the one, is at the greatest possible distance from the other. This is a matter of easy perception. God is not only the opposite of Satan, but infinitely above him in power and dominion; and to cleave to God in habits of piety, is just the way to be hid in his pavilion, and under the shield of his high protection. Nearness to him does not consist in any thing like local posi-

tion, but in an eminent moral resemblance to him, which detaches the mind from minor interests, and prompts it to holy intercourse with him in matters which are purely spiritual. Its very essence is vigorous activity, and not the quiescence of mere condition; but it is an activity which assimilates the soul to that about which it is occupied, and thus it suppresses the sin of the heart, and fortifies the man against evil suggestions. He cannot listen to the tempter, because his mind is pre-engaged; and he will not although he could, because his affections are spiritualized.

Nor is this all. The man who is exalted to affinity with God, and *dwells* in the exercise of pre-eminent piety, has fixed his residence in the very region, and lives in the very element, which sickens and paralyzes the tempter, and most effectually deters his approach; the dragon of the deep cannot come out of the waters to spread his devastations over the dwellings of men; and no more can the dragon of hell make his way into the region where the souls of Christians are fully occupied in acts of communion with their God. He may haunt the boundaries of that region in sullen and mortified malignity; his fiery darts may fly around it, or his insidious emissaries infest its precincts; but within these precincts Christians are safe, and neither his rage nor his policy can hurt them, unless they shall foolishly forego their privilege, and put themselves in his power. Christians, in short, have advantages here, if they knew but how to improve them, which are higher than Adam's in primitive purity. The continuance of his communion with God was left to depend on mere humanity, which

proved itself frail even when innocent ; but the continuance of theirs is on a different footing, and infinitely better provided for. It is not with God, in his absolute character, but with God in Christ, who is the Son of God in our nature, the anciently predicted seed of the woman, who has come and bruised the head of the serpent, laid him prostrate at his feet in irretrievable overthrow, and destroyed the very seat of his venomous malignity. Thus is Satan rendered feeble to the man who lives with God in Christ : but he is intimidated as well as enfeebled ; for, if even in the little affairs of men the vanquished quakes and cowers into submission before the majesty of his royal victor, inconceivably greater is the terror and awe inspired into Satan by the Prince of Life, who has penetrated the deepest of his deadly machinations, and made a show of them openly, triumphing over them on his cross. But Christ has done more than vanquished Satan—he has wrought out a reconciliation which removes the enmity of your heart to God, and inspires you with a spirit of adoption which enables you to see in him a Father's authority, and confide in the protection of a Father's love. The paternal relation, as every one knows, is one of the surest safeguards of morals which can be named in social life. A son of mischief will seldom dare to come into the presence of a father, and entice his child to disobedience before his very eyes. He knows his audacity would be instantly met with a burst of righteous indignation, and his impious visage frowned away to hide itself in infamy. But if the authority of a father, even among men, be so firm a bulwark against temptation—if almost all the social virtue which yet lingers

among unsanctified men, may fairly be traced to its wisdom and vigilance, how great must be the security of that man who is reconciled to the Father of being, and abides in his presence, looking up to him as the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, and his *own Father* in him ! There it is, and there alone, that this protective appellation is felt in all its majesty ; and it is as impossible for him who bears it to cause it to be dishonoured, as to give his glory to a creature, or his praise to graven images. But if he cannot cause it to be dishonoured—if he be as incapable of doing it indignity as of ceasing to be God over all ; it is absolutely certain, that they who claim him as their Father in Christ, and live up to the import of this relation, have all the protection from Satan's temptations which the power of the Godhead can command.

Nor is this the doctrine of mere theory, but of well-attested fact. In comparing your own varieties of exercise, you know that sin is most odious to you when your heart is nearest to God, and that your hatred of it is always diminished when your heart recedes from God, and sinks into inordinate concern about matters of temporary interest. In the one case, you can almost defy temptation ; in the other, it finds you an easy prey, dislodged from your spiritual stronghold, and predisposed to forbidden indulgence. It is the essence of wisdom then, never to forget, as do many, to their sad undoing, that it is not mere relation to God as your Father anew in Jesus Christ, but the suitable improvement of that relation, or drawing on it to the full amount of your ever-recurring necessities, which keeps you safe from the spiritual destroyer.

But the grand means of improving this relation is faith in your Father's testimony. It is the steady and vigorous exercise of faith which realizes the relation to your conscience, fills your heart with filial love, stirs you up to holy aspiring, and thus keeps you in your Father's presence ; and in proportion as this grace is weak, confused, or intermittent, your impression of his presence is effaced, and your heart invaded with alien propensities. " Take heed, brethren," said an apostle to a people entangled in this very snare, " lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief in departing from the living God ;" plainly telling them, that unbelief is equal to distance from God, while faith consists in being near to him ; that the heart which is under the influence of unbelief is led astray by depraved affections, while the heart which is under the influence of faith is purified and preserved ; and that the only way to avoid the former, and retain the latter, of these contrasted states of mind, is to cultivate a steady reliance on " the word of the truth of the gospel."

IV. It will promote your general Christian usefulness. There is a selfishness connected with the depraved condition of our nature, which maintains itself in fearful ascendancy in defiance of all our breeding or refinement, and just because it is the deformity of all, it is very seldom seen by any in any thing like its real enormity ; Christianity is the foe of this monster, and will as certainly overthrow it as did David the champion of Gath. But however certain this may be, it is no less so, that even Christians in this world are greatly under the influence of

selfishness, and often led by it into feelings and practices which the spirit of their religion decidedly disowns. Not only do they imitate the world in its selfish policy about worldly things, but they carry that policy into religion, and excuse themselves from taking interest in the spiritual concerns of others, because, as they argue, they have their hands full at home. This mode of arguing is utterly fallacious, even on the principles of enlightened self-love. Men are associated by him who created them without being consulted about the matter, and scarcely one of them has ever been found so completely soured into a passion for solitude, as not to give abundant evidence, that, after all, his nature is social. The proudest among us was dependent on others long before he could depend on himself, and thus made to share in a kindness which his nature, unsophisticated, impels him to reciprocate. But if, in point of fact, our condition be social, and if our nature be formed to that condition, the true way to gratify our love of ourselves, is to cherish the sympathies, and perform the duties, which our social circumstances require.

This is the way of consulting their interest which was originally prescribed to our race ; and Christianity founds on it her proffers and her claims, restoring her subjects to purity and benevolence, and teaching them to do themselves good, by labours of love for one another. We say not that *all* a Christian's activities should terminate directly in good to his neighbour—or that they should *all* terminate indirectly in glory to God, through this one medium ; for a Christian is as really an individual, as he is a part of an associated whole. Nay, the first of these views

of him being primary in itself, is entitled to the precedence, and the man who neglects what is due to himself, is thereby unfitted for duty to his neighbour. But we say, that the duties which he owes to his neighbour should bind his conscience as firmly as those which he owes to himself, and that steady attention to the former class of duties within their proper limits, and so far as they are made known to him, is indispensable to the prosperity of his personal religion. No man can expect to prosper who lives in open violation of Heaven's promulgated law, or in stinted and niggardly obedience to that law. In such circumstances his soul must be hampered, and the functions of spiritual life oppressed by a course of unnatural resistance to that which is ordained for their health and enlargement; and thus it is that religious selfishness, more speedily than most other sins, becomes its own punishment, and defeats its own end.

These things lay a deep foundation for the doctrine of general Christian usefulness, as the formative principle of human society, and largely enforced in the Christian record. The Christian who lays himself out to be useful, promotes his own interests; while the Christian who does not, is cruel to himself. And, if he look at the circumstances in which he is placed in social and relative life, he cannot fail to perceive, that a large portion of attainable good, for relatives and neighbours with whom he is connected, must remain unattained, unless he, and such as he, shall give themselves to the doing of it. Every Christian has his circle of good-doing, which is narrow or extensive as the wise Disposer of all things has chosen to make it so; and which must remain an empty circle,

to the disgrace of his profession, and to the injury of immortal souls, unless he shall fill it up. Christians in the aggregate are thus situated; and, by the wonderful arrangements of a gracious Providence, there is not so much as one of them, weak or strong, rich or poor, conspicuous or obscure, who is left unappropriated in the general plan. They see ignorance prevailing, and doing its work of eternal destruction, in circumstances of seclusion and timorous avoidance, which cannot possibly be reached by official Christian instructors; and this ignorance must prevail, until the hell of darkness here is succeeded by the hell of torment hereafter, unless *they* are stirred up to let in the light upon it. They see depravity prevailing, which is the more inveterate perhaps for their past neglect of it, and which draws out its victim to wander in a wilderness of moral barbarity and wild indulgence, from which he can never be reclaimed if *they* refuse to go after him. They see sorrow prevailing in almost all its nameless forms, procured by deeds of wilful folly, or sent, in awful sovereignty, by him who governs the destinies of men; and they know that its subjects must pine in solitude, or be tantalized by miserable comforters, unless they are intercepted by the sympathies of *their* assiduous Christian love. They see good as well as evil on the chequered field of human character, in the continuance, if not extension of associated piety with its kindred graces of holiness and love; and while they freely partake in the good which is thus disclosed to them, they ought to feel themselves sacredly bound to contribute to its augmentation.

If they look abroad on the scene around them,

they see a world lying in wickedness, with the cry of its misery reaching to heaven, and the means of its rescue placed in their hands; and deep indeed is their infatuation, if they do not feel themselves loudly called upon, by all that is tender in human sympathy, and all that is generous in Christian love, to unite for its deliverance. The Christian, in short, is the offspring of love, as a new creature in Christ Jesus; and that he may be a reflecter of love, in all its different modifications, to the good and to the bad, is one of the chief reasons why he is made to stand related to the human and Christian brotherhood. But the end of love is action, and action tending to usefulness, according to the present conditions of things. He must therefore do it justice by showing it in all its forms—in its charities in judging of others, that they may see him to be well disposed—in its benevolence in appreciating their excellence, that they may see him to be positively kind—in its patience in bearing with their infirmities, that they may see him to be considerate—in its readiness to forgive their offences, that they may see him to be not implacable—in its perseverance in friendly offices, that they may be won over to love in return. These are the ways in which love is fruitful of all the virtues which adorn society, and to this extent the Christian must carry it, or else come short of its practical aim. He is not merely to be just, but to magnify the principle of justice, till it swell out into generosity—not merely to take care of himself, but to look upon all that is human as a part of himself—not to sigh merely, or to weep, or to shudder at the sight of human misery, but to cultivate the

firmness of a man, and to lay out his Christian resources for alleviating that misery. He is to “walk in love, as Christ also hath loved us, and gave himself for us, an offering and a sacrifice unto God of a sweet-smelling savour.”

Such is a sketch of the course of usefulness to which every one ought to devote himself who bears the name of Jesus Christ, and there never was a time when vigorous effort in all the points referred to was more clearly seen to be duty, or more imperiously called for, than at this very day. Christians are at all times “the salt of the earth,” and wherever moral putridity appears, they should be ready to put forth their restoring or preserving influence. But the spirit of good-doing in our times is awakened from a sleep of ages, it stirs and is blessed in almost every field of labour which a sanctified ingenuity has discovered or appropriated, and the man who continues unexcited by all that is seen and heard around him, incurs a responsibility which is new and tremendous. Still it is often a hard matter, even for the Christian, to rise above selfish principles of action, and give himself freely up to the impulse of those which are generous and social; and it is yet a harder matter, to maintain himself on so rare an eminence after he has reached it. His indolence is against this; his habits are against it; his mistaken notions of duty are against it; his sense of injury from others, or suspicion of their selfish intentions, are powerfully opposed to it; all that remains of depravity within him is its most inveterate enemy, and when we add to this, the force of an opposing example, which is all but universal, we see a phalanx

of resistance which seems to render the attainment hopeless.

There is one way, and only one, in which the Christian can succeed in this important branch of duty; and that is, by aspiring to eminence in piety—not however in that distempered piety, which, although sincere, is mis-tutored and confined to a narrow compass, by the influence of local prejudice, or the zeal of religious party, or unhappy bodily temperament, or scanty and ill-assorted religious information; but in that health-giving kind of godliness, which takes its light, as well as its fire, from the expansive spirit of Christianity, as transfused through her own record; which is fed by views that are free and comprehensive, as well as just and rigidly thought; which looks at God in the true sublime of his mingled righteousness and love to man, and which forms the image of that which it beholds on the heart and character of its subjects. This modification of piety being the essence of obedience to the first table of the law, must necessarily prepare the mind for the duties of the second; and it is only in proportion as piety is felt in its true spirit and liberalizing influence, that the good of man as a Christian duty can be properly attended to. We may take it as a maxim which circumstances may modify, but cannot overthrow, that the man who is eminent for enlightened piety is also eminent for brotherly love; while the man who is defective in enlightened piety, is also defective in love to his brother in the Christian sense of that expression. The reason of this is easily seen. It was departing from God at first which taught man to depart from his brother, and returning to God

in Jesus Christ, is the only efficient instructor in the duty of brotherly love. Never could malice and social discord have invaded the primitive unity of our nature, but for the previous invasion of sin; and never can unity be wholly restored, till sin has been wholly exterminated. But sin, in the primary notion of it, strikes directly against God, and its injury to society is the consequence of this. It is opposition to his law; but his law, in precept to man, is a transcript from his nature, and therefore sin is opposition to his nature as the only living and true God. The proper expletive of sin then is ungodliness, or a practical denial of the Godhead as portrayed in his own law; but if this be a true account of its nature, then do we see that the opposite of its nature, or the grand means of its utter undoing, is the getting of a heart for practical piety. Look not first or exclusively at the creature, for if you do, you cannot love him; but look up to God as reconciled in Christ, and then your eye can descend on the creature reflecting the benignity which it caught in heaven.

If this point be clear in the abstraction of principle, it is yet more clear when considered in practice. There is, indeed, a human attachment which the undevout may bear to each other, and which, because it is human, or inheres in beings possessed of reason, may show itself superior to animal instinct; but as water cannot rise above its fountain, so neither can this inferior element come up to the dignity of moral usefulness. There is also a course of beneficent activity, which may sometimes be usefully pursued, (especially where piety is not expected,) by the man who has little religion, or, perhaps, none at all. But

this, although good in its form, and somewhat beneficial in its effects, is defective or vitiated in the motive from which it springs, and can never assume the freshness and vigour which are necessary to renovate society, by giving to character its full effect. Instances in point will occur in multitudes to all who are conversant with ordinary life. Has a man religious knowledge to impart? That knowledge may be accurate and industriously communicated, but it is not likely to fasten on the consciences of the ignorant, unless it be imbued with the unction of piety. Has he maxims of spiritual wisdom to inculcate? These maxims may be sound and judicious, but if he be known to be careless in putting them in practice, his lessons will be treated with contempt and derision. In short, if he has a family to educate, or operatives to superintend, or a flowing cup of prosperity to carry, or a heavy burden of affliction to bear, or is placed in circumstances special or common, which were obviously arranged by the God of providence, in order to give to piety its proper effect on himself and on others, while yet he allows himself in grievous shortcomings, he mars the usefulness of his own character, and stands forth a visible obstruction to Heaven's saving beneficence. This is the case in fact, and it must be so in the nature of things; for as piety is the characteristic of man by the great primary law of his being, which no disaster can ever undo, he is erect and useful, or prostrate and in ruins, according as it is or is not his reigning principle of action.

Is it so, then, that piety, or nearness to God, not in fits of excited feeling, but in the cool habit or

condition of your mind, will establish your confidence in godliness as a reality, and rectify your estimate of all terrestrial things, and fortify your mind against the temptations of your great spiritual adversary, and promote your general Christian usefulness?—Is it so, that these things enter into the essence of practical Christianity, ineffably enrich your own heart, and give your character its full weight of influence over others?—Is it so, that the average of godliness, even among those who possess it in reality, is greatly below what it ought to be, and that the general elevation of it would tend at once to renovate the church, and exceedingly to promote the conversion of the world?—Then, surely, this is a matter on which your heart should be solemnly set. The book which we now leave in your hand is eminently fitted for elevating piety. Let your intention in reading, however, coincide with the Author's intention in writing. If you take it up without an aim, it is every thing but certain you will lay it down without advantage. But if you open it in the spirit of meekness, and yield yourself up to its hallowed guidance, as a word in season to you, and to many thousands similarly situated, you cannot fail to find in it a very powerful stimulus to all that is Christian within you.

D. Y.

PERTH, *June*, 1830.



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THE
EPISTLE DEDICATORY.

To my dearly Beloved and longed for, the flock of Jesus Christ in Dartmouth, over whom the Holy Ghost hath made me an Overseer, sound Judgment, true Zeal, and unstained Purity are heartily wished.

MY DEAR FRIENDS,

THERE are three sad sights with which our eyes should continually affect our hearts. The first is, To behold, in every place, so many profane and dissolute persons who bear the very image of Satan; the face of whose conversation plainly discovers what they are, and whither they are going;—these look like themselves, the children of wrath. The second is, To see so many cursed hypocrites artificially disguising themselves, and with marvellous dexterity acting the part of saints, so that even a judicious eye may sometimes mistake the similar workings of the Spirit on them, for his saving workings on others. To hear such a person conferring, praying, bewailing his corruptions, and talking of his experiences, would easily persuade a man to believe, that he hath the heart as well as the face of a sincere Christian. For, *Sic oculos, sic ille manus, sic ora ferebat.* So the people of God do speak, so they pray, and even so they open their conditions;—these look like saints,

but are none. The third is, To see so many real saints in whom the Spirit of truth is, who yet, through the impetuous workings of their corruptions, and neglecting to watch over their hearts, do often fall into such scandalous practices, that they look like hypocrites, though they are not so.

These are three sad sights indeed ; and “ O that my head were waters, and mine eyes fountains of tears, that I might weep abundantly over them all ! ”

For the first I would mourn heartily, considering that they (so continuing) must be damned eternally, 2 Thess. i. 8, 9. 1 Cor. vi. 9.

For the second I would both weep and tremble, considering that they (so abiding) must be damned doubly, Matt. xxiv. 51.

And for the third, no less than any of the rest, because, though they themselves may and shall be saved, yet their examples make fast the bonds of death upon both the former, Matt. xviii. 7. 2 Sam. xii. 13, 14.

Alas ! that ever they should shed the blood of other souls, for whom Christ shed his own blood ! that ever they should be cruel to others, who have found Christ so kind to them ! I know they dare not do it directly and intentionally, but so it proves occasionally and eventually. Suffer me here to digress a little, and expostulate with these prejudiced and hardened souls, I will presently return to you again. O why do you injure your own souls by other men’s examples ? Because they stumble and break their shins, will you fall and break your necks ? I desire all such as harden themselves by these things, and take up a good opinion of their own deplorable

condition, would soberly consider and answer these three queries.

Quer. 1. Doth religion any way countenance or patronise the sinful practices of its professors; or doth it not rather impartially and severely condemn them? It is the glory of the Christian religion that it is "pure and undefiled," no doctrine so holy, nor doth any man make more provision for a holy life, Tit. ii. 11, 12. Indeed, there is a case wherein we may charge the evil practices of men upon their principles; but that is when their practices naturally flow from, and necessarily follow their principles. As, for example, if I see a Papist sin boldly, I may charge it upon his principles; for they set pardons to sale, and so make way for loose conduct. If I see an Arminian slight the grace of God, and proudly advance himself, I may charge it upon his principles, which directly lead to it: but can I do so, where such practices are condemned and provided against, by their own avowed principles who commit them?

Quer. 2. Is it not a most irrational thing to attack religion, because of the scandalous ways of some, whilst, in the meantime, you wholly slight and overlook the holy and heavenly conversation of many others? Are all that profess godliness loose and careless in their lives? No: some are an ornament to their profession, and the glory of Christ. And why must the innocent be condemned with the guilty? Why the eleven for one Judas?

Quer. 3. If you condemn religion because of the scandalous lives of some that profess it, must you not then cast off all religion in the world, and turn downright atheists? Surely this is the consequence

of it : for what religion is there, but some that profess it walk contrary to their profession ? and then, as Constantine told the Novatian, you must set up your ladder, and go to heaven by yourself.

But, alas ! it is not our printed apologies for religion, but the visible reformations of its professors, that must both preserve its honour, and remove those fatal stumbling-blocks, at which the blind world strikes and falls into eternal perdition.

Now, there are two ways by which this may be effected. First, By convincing the consciences of professors of their miscarriages, and the evil aggravations of them. Secondly, By medicating the heart, and cleansing the fountain whence they proceed. In the first of these, a worthy and eminent servant of Christ hath lately laboured, holding a clear gospel glass before the faces of professors, which truly represents their spots and blemishes. If he that reads it will consider, apply, and practise, it shall doubtless turn to his salvation ; but if it turn to no good account to him that reads it, I know it shall turn to a testimony for him that wrote it. The second is a principal design of this small treatise, the subject of which is exceeding weighty, and of daily use to the people of God, though the manner of handling it be attended with many defects and weaknesses : every one cannot be excellent who yet may be useful.

I will exercise your patience no longer than whilst I tell you,

First, Why I publish it to the view of the world.

Second, Why I direct it particularly to you.

First, for the publication of it, take this sincere and brief account—that as I was led to this subject by

a special providence, so I was led to the publication of it by a kind of necessity. The providence at first leading me to it was this:—A dear and choice friend of my intimate acquaintance being under much inward trouble on account of some special heart disorder, opened the case to me, and earnestly requested some rules and helps in that particular. Whilst I was bending my thoughts to that special case, divers other cases of equal importance (some of which were dependent upon that consideration) occurred to my thoughts; and this scripture, which I have insisted upon, presented itself as a fit foundation for the whole discourse; which, being lengthened out to what you see, various friends requested me to transcribe for their use several of the cases here handled, and some others begged me to publish the whole, to which I was in a manner necessitated, to save the pains of transcribing, which, to me, is a very tedious and tiresome work: and just as I had almost finished the copy, an opportunity presented to make it public. So that, from first to last, I have been carried beyond my first intentions in this thing.

Objection. If any say, the world is even cloyed with books, and therefore though the discourse be necessary, yet the publication is needless.

Solution 1. I answer, there are multitudes of books indeed, and of them, many concern not themselves about essential truths and practical godliness, but spend their strength upon impracticable notions and frivolous controversies; many also strike at essential truths, and endeavour to undermine the power of godliness: and some there are that nourish the root, and tend to clear and confirm, to prepare and apply

the great truths of the gospel, that they may be bread for souls to live and feed on. Now, though I could wish that those who have handled the pen of the scribe, had better employed their time and pains than to obtrude such useless discourses upon the world; yet, for books of the latter rank, I say, that when husbandmen complain of too much corn, let Christians complain of too many such books.

Sol. 2. And if you be so highly conceited of your own furniture and ability, that such books are needless to you; if you let them alone they will do you no hurt, and other poor hungry souls will be glad of them, and bless God for what you despise and leave.

Obj. If it be said that several of the cases here handled touch not your condition, I answer—

Sol. 1. That which is not your condition, may be another's. If you be placed in an easy, full, and prosperous state, and so have no need of the helps here offered to support your hearts under pinching wants, others are forced to live by faith for every day's provision. If you be dandled upon the knee of providence, some of your brethren are under its feet. If you have inward peace and tranquillity of spirit, and so need not the counsels here given to ward off those desperate conclusions that poor afflicted souls are ready to draw upon themselves at such a time; yet it may be a word in season to them, and they may say as David to Abigail, “Blessed be thou of the Lord, and blessed be thy advice.”

Sol. 2. That may be your condition shortly, which is not your condition at present. Say not thy mountain stands strong, thou shalt never be moved: there are changes in the right hand of the Most High, and

then those truths which are little more esteemed than hedge-fruits, will be as apples of gold in pictures of silver, Jer. xxxiii. 10, 11. The prophet there teaches the Jews (who then dwelt in their own houses) how to defend their religion in Babylon, and what they should say to the Chaldeans there, and therefore that verse is written in Chaldee. So much for the reasons of its publication : next for the publication of it to you. I was induced thereto by the consideration,

1. Of the relation I have to you above all the people in the world. I look upon my gifts as yours, my time as yours, and all the talents I am intrusted with as yours. It is not with you as with a woman whose husband is dead, and so is freed from the law of her husband : the relation still continues, and so do all the mutual duties of it.

2. By the consideration of my necessary absence from you. I would not that personal absence should by insensible degrees untwist (as usually it doth) the cord of friendship, and therefore I have endeavoured (as absent friends use to do) to preserve and strengthen it by this small remembrance. It was Vespasian's answer to Apollonius, when he desired access for two philosophers : My doors (said Vespasian) are always open to philosophers, but my very breast is open to thee. I cannot say with him, my doors are open for the free access of friends, being by a sad providence shut against myself : but this I can say, my very breast is still open to you, you are as dear to me as ever.

3. Another inducement (and indeed the main) was the perpetual usefulness and necessity of these truths for you, of which you will have continual need : and I know few of you have such happy memories to retain,

and I cannot be always with you to inculcate these things; but I was willing to leave this with you as a legacy, as a testimony of sincere love for and care over you. This may counsel and direct you when I cannot. I may be rendered useless to you by a civil or natural death: but this will outlive me—and O that it may serve your souls when I am silent in the dust!

To hasten now to a conclusion, I have only these three requests to you, which I earnestly beseech you not to deny me; yea, I charge you, as ever you hope to appear with comfort before the great Shepherd, do not dare to slight these requests.

1. Above all other studies in the world, study your own hearts; waste not a minute more of your precious time about frivolous and unsubstantial controversies. It is reported even of Bellarmine, (how truly I examine not,) that he turned with loathing from the study of school-divinity, because it wanted the sweet juice of piety. I had rather it should be said of you, as one said of Swinkfeldius, “He wanted a regular head, but not an honest heart,” than that you should have regular heads and irregular hearts. My dear flock, I have, according to the grace given me, laboured in the course of my ministry among you, to feed you with the heart-strengthening bread of practical doctrine, and I do assure you, it is far better you should have the sweet and saving impressions of gospel truths, feelingly and powerfully conveyed to your hearts, than only to understand them by a bare ratiocination, or a dry syllogistical inference. Leave trifling studies to such as have time lying on their hands, and know not how to employ it. Remember you are at the door of eternity, and have other work to do. Those hours you

spend upon heart-work in your closets, are the golden spots of all your time, and will have the sweetest influence up to your last hour. Never forget those sermons I preached to you upon that subject, from 2 Kings xx. 2, 3. Heart-work is weighty and difficult work; an error there may cost you your souls. I may say of it, as Augustine speaks of the doctrine of the Trinity, "A man can err in nothing more easily or more dangerously." O then study your hearts.

2. My next request is, that you will carefully look to your conversations, and be accurate in all your ways; hold forth the word of life. Be sure, by the strictness and holiness of your lives, to settle yourselves in the very consciences of your enemies. Remember that your lives must be produced in the great day, to judge the world, 1 Cor. vi. 2. O then, what manner of persons ought you to be! You have many eyes over you—the omniscient eye of God, that searches the heart and reins, Rev. ii. 23.: the vigilant eye of Satan, Job i. 7, 8.: the envious eye of enemies, that curiously observe you, Psal. v. 8.: the quick and observant eye of conscience, which none of your actions escape, Rom. ix. 1.

O then be precise and accurate in all manner of conversation: keep up the power of godliness in your closets and families, and then you will not let it fall in your more public employments and converses in the world. I have often told you that it is the honour of the gospel, that it makes the best parents and children; the best masters and servants; the best husbands and wives in the world.

3. My third and last request is, that you pray for me. I hope I can say, and I am sure some of you

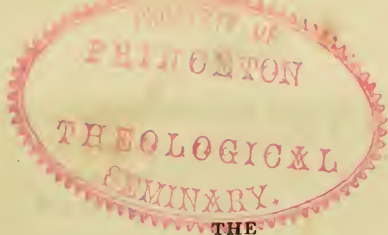
have acknowledged, that I came at first among you as the return and answer of your prayers; and indeed so it should be, see Luke x. 2. I am persuaded also, I have been carried on in my work by your prayers; it is sweet when it is so, see Ephes. vi. 18, 19. And I hope by your prayers to receive yet a farther benefit, even that which is mentioned, Heb. xiii. 18, 19. Philem. 22. And truly it is but just you should pray for me, I have often prayed for you; let the pulpit, family, and closet witness for me: and God forbid I should sin against the Lord in ceasing to pray for you.

Yea, friends, your own interest may persuade to it: what mercies you obtain for me redound to your own advantage: if God preserve me, it is for your use and service: the more gifts and graces a minister hath, the better for them that shall wait on his ministry; the more God gives unto me, the more I shall be able to give out to you. I will detain you no longer, but entreat you to accept this small testimony of my great love, and have recourse to it as the exigencies of your condition shall require. Read it consideringly and obediently: judge it not by the dress and style, but by the weight and savour of what you read. It is a good rule of Bernard, in reading books, "Regard not so much the science, as the savour." That it may prove the savour of life unto life to you, and all those into whose hands it shall come, is the hearty desire of,

Your loving and faithful Pastor,

JOHN FLAVEL.

From my Study at Ley, in Slapton, }
Oct. 7, 1667.



SAINT INDEED.



PROVERBS iv. 23.

“Keep thy heart with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life.”

THE heart of man is his worst part before it be regenerate, and the best afterwards: it is the seat of principles, and fountain of actions. The eye of God is, and the eye of the Christian ought to be, principally fixed upon it.

The greatest difficulty in conversion, is to win the heart to God; and the greatest difficulty after conversion, is to keep the heart with God. Here lies the very difficulty and stress of religion: here is that which makes the way to life a narrow way, and the gate to heaven a strait gate. Direction and help in this great work, are the scope and sum of this text; wherein we have,

I. An exhortation, “Keep thy heart with all diligence.”

II. The reason or motive enforcing it, “For out of it are the issues of life.”

In the exhortation I shall consider,

1. The matter of the duty.

2. The manner of performing it.

1. The matter of the duty, "keep thy heart."

Heart is not here taken properly for that noble part of the body which philosophers call the first that lives, and the last that dies; but by *heart*, in a metaphor, the Scripture sometimes understands some particular noble faculty of the soul. In Rom. i. 21. it is put for the understanding part "their foolish heart," that is, "their foolish understanding was darkened." And Psal. cxix. 11. it is put for the memory, "thy word have I hid in my heart." And, 1 John iii. 10. it is put for the conscience, which hath in it both the light of the understanding, and the recognitions of the memory: "If our heart condemn us," that is, if our conscience; whose proper office it is to condemn. But here we are to take it more generally for the whole soul, or inner man: for what the heart is to the body, that the soul is to the man; and what health is to the heart, that holiness is to the soul. The state of the whole body depends upon the soundness and vigour of the heart, and the everlasting state of the whole man upon the good or ill condition of the soul.

And by "keeping the heart," understand the diligent and constant use and improvement of all holy means and duties, to preserve the soul from sin, and maintain its sweet and free communion with God.* La-

* I say constant, for the reason added in the text extends the duty to all the states and conditions of a Christian life, and makes it bind always: if the heart must be kept because out of it are the issues of life, then as long as these issues of life do flow out of it, we are obliged to keep it.

vator *in loc.* will have the word taken from a besieged garrison, begirt by many enemies without, and in danger of being betrayed by treacherous citizens within; in which danger, the soldiers upon pain of death are commanded to watch: and whereas the expression, “keep thy heart” seems to put it upon us as our work, yet it doth not imply a sufficiency or ability in us to do it. We are as able to stop the sun in its course, or make the rivers run backward, as by our own skill and power to rule and order our hearts: we may as well be our own saviours as our own keepers; and yet Solomon speaks properly enough, when he saith, “keep thy heart;” because the duty is ours, though the power be God’s. A natural man hath no power, a gracious man hath some, though not sufficient; and that power he hath, depends upon the exciting and assisting strength of Christ. Grace within us is beholden to grace without us. “Without me ye can do nothing.” So much of the matter of the duty.

2. The manner of performing it is, “with all diligence.” The Hebrew is very emphatical, *q. d.* ‘Keep, keep; set double guards: your hearts will be gone else.’ And this vehemency of expression with which the duty is urged, plainly implies how difficult it is to keep our hearts, and how dangerous to let them go.

3. The reason or motive quickening to this duty is very forcible and weighty: “For out of it are the issues of life;” that is, it is the source and fountain of all vital actions and operations. Saith Jerome, “It is the spring and original both of good and evil, as the spring in a watch that sets all the wheels in motion.” The heart is the treasury, the hand and tongue but the shops; what is in these comes from

thence, the hand and tongue always begin where the heart ends. The heart contrives, and the members execute. “A good man out of the good treasure of his heart bringeth forth good things, and an evil man out of the evil treasure of his heart bringeth forth evil things; for out of the abundance of his heart, his mouth speaketh.” So then, if the heart err in its work, these must needs miscarry in theirs; for heart-errors are like the errors of the first concoction, which cannot be rectified afterwards; or like the misplacing and inverting of the stamps and letters in the press, which must needs cause so many errata in all the copies that are printed off. O then, how important a duty is that which is contained in the following proposition!

DOCTRINE—*That the keeping and right managing of the heart in every condition, is the great business of a Christian's life.*

What the philosopher saith of waters, is as properly applicable to hearts, it is hard to keep them within any bounds. God hath set bounds and limits to them, yet how frequently do they transgress, not only the bounds of grace and religion, but even of reason and common honesty! this is that which affords the Christian matter of labour, fear, and trembling, to his dying day. It is not the cleansing of the hand that makes a Christian, for many a hypocrite can show as fair a hand as he; but the purifying, watching, and right ordering of the heart: this is the thing that provokes so many sad complaints, and costs so many deep groans and brinish tears. It was the pride of Hezekiah's heart that made him lie in the dust, mourning before the Lord, 2 Chron. xxxii. 26. It was the fear of hypocrisy invading the heart, that

made David cry, "Let my heart be found in thy statutes, that I be not ashamed." It was the sad experience he had of the divisions and distractions of his own heart in the service of God, that made him pour out that prayer, "Unite my heart to fear thy name."

The method in which I shall improve the point shall be this:—

First, I shall inquire what the keeping of the heart supposes and imports.

Secondly, Assign divers reasons why Christians must make this the great work and business of their lives.

Thirdly, Point out those special seasons which especially call for this diligence in keeping the heart.

Fourthly, Apply the whole in several uses.

1. What the keeping of the heart supposes and imports.

To keep the heart, necessarily supposes a previous work of sanctification, which hath set the heart right by giving it a new spiritual bent and inclination; for as long as the heart is not set right by grace as to its habitual frame, no duties or means can keep it right with God. Self is the poise of the unsanctified heart, which biases and moves it in all its designs and actions; and as long as it is so, it is impossible that any external means should keep it with God.

Man, by creation, was of one constant, uniform frame and tenor of spirit, held one straight and even course; not one thought or faculty ravelled or disordered: his mind had a perfect illumination to understand and know the will of God; his will a per-

fect compliance therewith; his sensitive appetite and other inferior powers stood in a most obedient subordination.

Man, by degeneration, is become a most disordered and rebellious creature, contesting with and opposing his Maker, as the first cause, by self-dependence; as the chiefest good, by self-love; as the highest lord, by self-will; and as the last end, by self-seeking—and so is quite disordered, and all his acts irregular: his illuminated understanding is clouded with ignorance; his complying will, full of rebellion and stubbornness; his subordinate powers, casting off the dominion and government of the superior faculties.

But by regeneration this disordered soul is set right again, sanctification being the rectifying and due framing, or as the scripture phrases it, the renovation of the soul “after the image of God.” In which self-dependence is removed by faith, self-love by the love of God, self-will by subjection and obedience to the will of God, and self-seeking by self-denial. The darkened understanding is again illuminated, Eph. i. 18.: the refractory will sweetly subdued, Psal. cx. 3.: the rebellious appetite, or concupiscence, gradually conquered, Rom. vi. 7. *per tot.* And thus the soul, which sin had universally depraved, is again by grace restored and rectified.

This being presupposed, it will not be difficult to comprehend what it is to keep the heart, which is nothing else but the constant care and diligence of such a renewed man, to preserve his soul in that holy frame to which grace hath reduced it, and daily strives to hold it.

For though grace hath, in a great measure, recti-

fied the soul, and given it an habitual and heavenly temper, yet sin often actually discomposes it again; so that even a gracious heart is like a musical instrument, which, though it be ever so exactly tuned, a small matter brings it out of tune again; yea, hang it aside but a little, and it will need setting again, before you can play another lesson on it: even so stands the case with gracious hearts; if they are in frame in one duty, yet how dull, dead, and disordered when they come to another, and therefore every duty needs a particular preparation of the heart: “If thou prepare thine heart, and stretch out thine hands towards him.” Well then, to keep the heart, is carefully to preserve it from sin, which disorders it; and maintain that spiritual and gracious frame which fits it for a life of communion with God:—and this includes these six acts in it:

1st, Frequent observation of the frame of the heart, turning in and examining how the case stands with it: this is one part of the work. Carnal and formal persons take no heed to this, they cannot be brought to confer with their own hearts: there are some men and women that have lived forty or fifty years in the world, and have scarce had one hour’s discourse with their own hearts all that while: it is a hard thing to bring a man and himself together upon such an account: but saints know those soliloquies and self-conferences to be of excellent use and advantage. The heathen could say, the soul is made wise by sitting still in quietness. Though bankrupts care not to look into their books of accounts, yet upright hearts will know whether they go backward or forward: “I commune with mine own heart.” The

heart can never be kept until its case be examined and understood.

2dly, It includes deep humiliation for heart-evils and disorders. Thus Hezekiah humbled himself for the pride of his heart, 2 Chron. xxxii. 26. Thus the people were ordered to spread forth their hands to God in prayer, in a sense of the plague of their own hearts, 1 Kings viii. 38. Upon this account many an upright heart hath been laid low before God: O what a heart have I! They have in their confessions pointed at the heart, the pained place—Lord, here is the wound, here is the plague-sore. It is with the heart well kept, as it is with the eye, which is a fit emblem of it; if a small dust get into the eye, it will never leave twinkling and watering till it have wept it out: so the upright heart cannot be at rest till it have wept out its troubles, and poured out its complaints before the Lord.

3dly, It includes earnest supplications, and instant prayer, for heart-purifying and rectifying grace, when sin hath defiled and disordered it: “Cleanse thou me from secret faults;” and, “Unite my heart to fear thy name.” Saints have always many such petitions depending before the throne of God’s grace: this is the thing which is most pleaded by them with God. When they are praying for outward mercies, haply their spirits may be more remiss; but when it comes to the heart-case, then they extend their spirits to the utmost, fill their mouths with arguments, weep and make supplication: O for a better heart! O for a heart to love God more, to hate sin more, to walk more evenly with God! Lord, deny not to me such a heart, whatever thou deny

me: give me a heart to fear thee, love and delight in thee, if I beg my bread in desolate places. It is observed of holy Mr. Bradford, that, when he was confessing sin, he would never give over confessing until he had felt some brokenness of heart for that sin; and when praying for any spiritual mercy, would never give over that suit, until he had got some relish of that mercy: that is the third thing included in keeping the heart.

4thly, It includes the imposing of strong engagements and bonds upon ourselves to walk more accurately with God, and avoid the occasions whereby the heart may be induced to sin. Well composed, advised, and deliberate vows are, in some cases, of excellent use to guard the heart against some special sin: "I made a covenant with mine eyes." By this means, holy ones have overawed their souls, and preserved themselves from defilement by some special heart corruptions.

5thly, It includes a constant holy jealousy over our own hearts. Quick-sighted self-jealousy is an excellent preservative from sin. He that will keep his heart, must have the eyes of his soul awake and open upon all the disorderly and tumultuous stirrings of his affections: if the affections break loose, and the passions be stirred, the soul must discover and suppress them before they get to a height. O my soul! dost thou well in this? My tumultuous thoughts and passions, where is your commission?

"Happy is the man that thus feareth always." By this fear of the Lord it is that men depart from evil, shake off security, and preserve themselves from iniquity. He that will keep his heart, must feed with

fear, rejoice with fear, and pass the whole time of his sojourning here in fear: and all little enough to keep the heart from sin.

6thly, And, lastly, to add no more, it includes the realizing of God's presence with us, and setting the Lord always before us. This the people of God have found a singular means to keep their hearts upright, and awe them from sin. When the eye of our faith is fixed upon the eye of God's omniscience, we dare not let out our thoughts and affections to vanity: holy Job durst not suffer his heart to yield to an impure, vain thought; and what was it that moved him to so great a circumspection? Why, he tells you, "Doth he not see my ways, and count all my steps?" "Walk before me," saith God to Abraham, "and be thou perfect." Even as parents use to set their children in the congregation before them, knowing that else they will be toying and playing, so would the heart of the best man too, were it not for the eye of God.

In these, and such like particulars, do gracious souls express the care they have of their hearts. They are as careful to prevent the breaking loose of their corruptions in times of temptation, as seamen are to bind fast the guns, that they break not loose in a storm; as careful to preserve the sweetness and comfort they have got from God in any duty, as one that comes out of a hot bath, or great sweat, is of taking cold by going forth into the chill air:—this is the work, and of all works in religion it is the most difficult, constant, and important work.

1. It is the hardest work: heart-work is hard work indeed. To shuffle over religious duties with a loose

and heedless spirit, will cost no great pains; but to set thyself before the Lord, and tie up thy loose and vain thoughts to a constant and serious attendance upon him, this will cost thee something. To attain a facility and dexterity of language in prayer, and put thy meaning into apt and decent expressions, is easy; but to get thy heart broken for sin whilst thou art confessing it, melted with free grace whilst thou art blessing God for it, to be really ashamed and humbled through the apprehensions of God's infinite holiness, and to keep thy heart in this frame, not only in but after duty, will surely cost thee some groans and travailing pains of soul. To repress the outward acts of sin, and compose the external part of thy life in a laudable and comely manner, is no great matter; even carnal persons, by the force of common principles, can do this: but to kill the root of corruption within, to set and keep up a holy government over thy thoughts, to have all things lie straight and orderly in the heart, this is not easy.

2. It is a constant work: the keeping of the heart is such a work, as is never done till life be done. This labour and our life end together. It is with a Christian in this business, as it is with seamen that have sprung a leak at sea; if they tug not constantly at the pump, the water increases upon them, and will quickly sink them: it is in vain for them to say the work is hard, and we are weary. There is no time or condition in the life of a Christian, which will suffer an intermission of this work. It is in the keeping watch over our hearts, as it was in the keeping up of Moses' hands, whilst Israel and Amalek were fighting below. No sooner do Moses' hands grow heavy

and sink down, but Amalek prevails. You know it cost David and Peter many a sad day and night for intermitting the watch over their own hearts but a few minutes.

3. It is the most important business of a Christian's life. Without this we are but formalists in religion: all our professions, gifts, and duties signify nothing: "My son, give me thine heart." God is pleased to call that a gift, which is indeed a debt: he will put this honour upon the creature to receive it from him in the way of a gift; but if this be not given him he regards not whatever else you bring to him: there is so much only of worth and value in what we do, as there is of heart in it. Concerning the heart, God seems to say as Joseph of Benjamin, "If you bring not Benjamin with you, you shall not see my face." Among the heathens, when the beast was cut up for sacrifice, the first thing the priest looked upon was the heart, and if that was unsound and naught, the sacrifice was rejected. God rejects all duties (how glorious soever in other respects) offered him without a heart. He that performs duty without a heart, that is, heedlessly, is no more accepted with God than he that performs it with a double heart, that is, hypocritically, Isa. lxvi. 3. And thus I have briefly opened the nature of the duty, what is imported in this phrase, "Keep thy heart."

2. Next, I shall give you some rational account, why Christians should make this the great business of their lives, "to keep their hearts."

The importance and necessity of making this our great and main business, will manifestly appear in that, 1. The honour of God. 2. The sincerity of

our profession. 3. The beauty of our conversation. 4. The comfort of our souls. 5. The improvement of our graces: and, 6. Our stability in the hour of temptation,—are all wrapt up in, and dependent on, our sincerity and care in the management of this work.

1. The glory of God is much concerned therein: heart-evils are very provoking evils to the Lord. The schools do well observe, that outward sins are sins of great infamy, but heart-sins are sins of deeper guilt. How severely hath the great God declared his wrath from heaven against heart-wickedness? The great crime for which the old world stands indicted, is heart-wickedness: “God saw that every imagination (or fiction) of the heart was only evil, and that continually:” for which he sent the dreadfullest judgment that was ever executed since the world began: “And the Lord said, I will destroy man whom I have created, from the face of the earth, both man and beast, and the creeping things, and the fowls of heaven, for it repenteth me that I have made man.” We find not their murders, adulteries, blasphemies, (though they were defiled with these,) particularly alleged against them; but the evils of their hearts; yea, that which God was so provoked by, as to give up his peculiar inheritance into the enemies’ hand, was the evil of their hearts. O Jerusalem, “wash thine heart from wickedness, that thou mayest be saved: how long shall vain thoughts lodge within thee.” The wickedness and vanity of their thoughts, God took special notice of; and because of this, the Chaldean must come upon them as a “lion from his thicket, and tear them to pieces.” For the

very sin of thoughts it was that God threw down the fallen angels from heaven, and keeps them still in everlasting chains to the judgment to which they are reserved; as prisoners that have most irons laid upon them, may be supposed to be the greatest malefactors. And what was their sin? Why only spiritual wickedness, for they, having no bodily organs, could act nothing externally against God. Yea, mere heart-evils are so provoking, that for them he rejects with indignation all the duties that some men perform unto him: “He that killeth an ox, is as if he slew a man; he that sacrificeth a lamb, as if he cut off a dog’s neck; he that offereth an oblation, as if he offered swine’s blood; he that burneth incense, as if he blessed an idol.” In what words could the abhorrence of a creature’s actions be more fully expressed by the holy God? Murder and idolatry are not more vile in his account than their sacrifices, though materially such as himself appointed. And what made them so? The following words inform us: “Their soul delighteth in their abominations.”

To conclude, such is the vileness of mere heart-sins, that the Scriptures sometimes intimate the difficulty of pardon for them. So in the case of Simon Magus. His heart was not right, he had vile thoughts of God, and the things of God: the apostle bids him “repent and pray, if perhaps the thoughts of his heart might be forgiven him.” O then, never slight heart-evils! for by these God is highly wronged and provoked: and for this reason, let every Christian make it his work to keep his heart with all diligence.

2. The sincerity of our profession depends much

upon the care and conscience we have in keeping our hearts; for it is most certain, that a man is but a hypocrite in his profession, how curious soever he be in the externals of religion, that is heedless and careless of the frame of his heart. You have a pregnant instance of this in the case of Jehu: "But Jehu took no heed to walk in the ways of the Lord God of Israel with his heart." That context gives us an account of the great service performed by Jehu against the house of Ahab and Baal, as also of a great temporal reward given him by God for that service, even that his children to the fourth generation should sit upon the throne of Israel. And yet in these words Jehu is censured for a hypocrite: though God approved and rewarded the work, yet he abhorred and rejected the person that did it as hypocritical. And wherein lay his hypocrisy, but in this—that he "took no heed to walk in the ways of the Lord with his heart?" that is, he did all insincerely and for self-ends: and though the work he did was materially good, yet he, not purging his heart from those unworthy self-designs in doing it, was a hypocrite. And Simon, of whom we spake before, though he appeared such a person that the apostle could not regularly refuse him, yet his hypocrisy was quickly discovered: and what discovered it but this, that though he professed and associated himself with the saints, yet he was a stranger to the mortification of heart-sins? "Thy heart is not right with God." It is true there is a great difference among Christians themselves, in their diligence and dexterity about heart-work: some are more conversant and successful in it than others are; but he that

takes no heed to his heart, that is not careful to order it aright before God, is but a hypocrite: “And they come unto thee as the people cometh, and sit before thee as my people, and they hear thy words, but they will not do them: for with their mouth they show much love, but their heart goeth after their covetousness.” Here were a company of formal hypocrites, as it is evident by that expression, “as my people,”—like them, but not of them. And what made them so? Their outside was fair: here were reverent postures, high professions, much seeming joy and delight in ordinances—“thou art to them as a lovely song;”—yea, but for all that, they kept not their hearts with God in those duties; their hearts were commanded by their lusts, they went after their covetousness. Had they kept their hearts with God, all had been well; but not regarding which way their hearts went in duty, there lay the core of their hypocrisy.

Obj. If any upright soul should hence infer, ‘Then I am a hypocrite too; for many times my heart departs from God in duty: do what I can, yet I cannot hold it close with God.’

Sol. To this I answer, the very objection carries in it its own solution. Thou sayest, ‘Do what I can, yet I cannot keep my heart with God.’ Soul, if thou dost what thou canst, thou hast the blessing of an upright, though God sees good to exercise thee under the affliction of a discomposed, heart. There remains still some wildness in the thoughts and fancies of the best to humble them; but if you find a care before to prevent them, opposition against them when they come, and grief and sorrow afterwards,

you will find enough to clear you from reigning hypocrisy.

First, This fore-care is seen, partly in laying up the word in thine heart to prevent them—"Thy word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against thee;" partly in our endeavours to engage our hearts to God, Jer. xxx. 21.; and partly in begging preventing grace from God in our onsets upon duty, Psalm cxix. 36, 37. It is a good sign where this care goes before a duty.

And, second, It is a sweet sign of uprightness to oppose them in their first rise: "I hate vain thoughts"—"The Spirit lusteth against the flesh."

And, third, Thy after-grief discovers thy upright heart. If, with Hezekiah, thou art humbled for the evils of thy heart, thou hast no reason for these disorders to question the integrity of it: but to suffer sin to lodge quietly in the heart, to let thy heart habitually and uncontrolledly wander from God, is a sad and dangerous symptom indeed.

(III.) The beauty of our conversation arises from the heavenly frame and holy order of our spirits. There is a spiritual lustre and beauty in the conversation of saints—"the righteous is more excellent than his neighbour," they shine as the lights of the world: but whatever lustre and beauty is in their lives, comes from the excellency of their spirits; as the candle within puts a lustre upon the lantern in which it shines. It is impossible that a disordered and neglected heart should ever produce a well-ordered conversation; and since (as the text observes) the issues or streams of life flow out of the heart, as their fountain, it must needs follow, that

such as the heart is, the life will be : hence, “ abstain from fleshly lusts—having your conversation honest,” or beautiful, as the Greek word imports. “ Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts.” His way notes the course of his life, his thoughts the frame of his heart ; and therefore, since the way and course of his life flows from his thoughts, or the frame of his heart, both or neither will be forsaken. The heart is the womb of all actions ; these actions are virtually and seminally contained in our thoughts ; these thoughts, being once made up into affections, are quickly made out into suitable actions and practices. If the heart be wicked—then, as Christ saith, “ Out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries,” &c. Mark the order—first, wanton or revengeful thoughts ; then, unclean or murderous practices. And if the heart be holy and spiritual, then, as David speaks from sweet experience, “ My heart is inditing a good matter : I speak of the things which I have made—my tongue is as the pen of a ready writer.” Here is a life richly beautified with good works : some ready made—“ I will speak of the things which I have made ;” others upon the wheel making—“ My heart is inditing ;” but both proceeding from the heavenly frame of his heart.

Put but the heart in frame, and the life will quickly discover that it is so. I think it is not very difficult to discern, by the duties and converses of Christians, what frames their spirits are under. Take a Christian in a good frame, and how serious, heavenly, and profitable will his converses and duties be ! What a lovely companion is he, during the continuance of it ! It would do any one’s heart good, to be with him at

such a time. “The mouth of the righteous speaketh wisdom, and his tongue talketh of judgment, the law of his God is in his heart.”

When the heart is up with God, and full of God, how dexterously and ingenuously will he wind in spiritual discourse ! improving every occasion and advantage to some heavenly purpose : few words run then at the waste-spout.

And what else can be the reason why the discourses and duties of many Christians are become so frothy and unprofitable, their communion both with God and one another become as a dry stack, but because their hearts are neglected ? Surely this must be the reason of it—and verily it is an evil greatly to be bewailed—for want of this Christian fellowship it is become a sapless thing : so the attracting beauty that was wont to shine from the conversations of the saints upon the faces and consciences of the world, (which, if it did not allure and bring them into love with the ways of God, yet, at the least, left a testimony in their consciences of the excellency of those men and their way,) is in a great measure lost, to the unspeakable detriment of religion.

Time was when Christians did carry it at such a rate, that the world stood at a gaze at them, as the word, 1 Pet. iv. 4. imports. Their life and language were of a different strain from others, their tongues discovered them to be Galileans wherever they came ; but now, since vain speculations and fruitless controversies have so much obtained, and heart-work, practical godliness, so much neglected among professors, the case is sadly altered, their discourse is become like other men’s. If they come among you now,

they may (to allude to that, Acts ii. 6.) “hear every man speak in his own language.” And truly I have little hope to see this evil redressed, and the credit of religion again repaired, until Christians fall to their old work—till they ply heart-work closer. When the salt of heavenly-mindedness is again cast into the spring, the streams will run clearer and sweeter.

(iv.) The comfort of our souls doth much depend upon the keeping of our hearts; for he that is negligent in attending his own heart, is (ordinarily) a great stranger to assurance, and the sweet comforts flowing from it.

Indeed, if the Antinomian doctrine were true, which teaches you to reject all marks and signs for the trial of your condition, telling you it is the Spirit only that immediately assures you, by witnessing your adoption directly without them—then you might be careless of your hearts, yea, strangers to them, and yet not strangers to comfort: but since both Scripture and experience do confute this dotage, I hope you will never look for comfort in that unscriptural way. I deny not but it is the work and office of the Spirit to assure you; and yet do confidently affirm, that if ever you attain assurance in the ordinary way wherein God dispenses it, you must take pains with your own hearts: you may expect your comforts upon easier terms; but I am mistaking, if ever you enjoy them upon any other—“Give all diligence: prove yourselves.” This is the Scripture way. I remember Mr. Roberts, in his treatise on the covenant, tells us, that he knew a Christian who, in the infancy of his Christianity, so vehemently panted after the infallible assurance of God’s love,

that for a long time together he earnestly desired some voice from heaven; yea, sometimes walking in the solitary fields, earnestly desired some miraculous voice from the trees and stones there;—this, after many desires and longings, was denied him; but in time a better was afforded, in the ordinary way of searching the word and his own heart. An instance of the like nature the learned Gerson gives us, of one that was driven by temptation upon the very borders of desperation. At last, being sweetly settled and assured, one asked him how he attained it? He answered, ‘Not by any extraordinary revelation, but by subjecting his understanding to the Scriptures, and comparing his own heart with them.’ The Spirit indeed assures by witnessing our adoption; and he witnesseth two ways.

1. Objectively—that is, by working those graces in our souls, which are the conditions of the promise: and so the Spirit and his graces in us are all one—the Spirit of God dwelling in us is a mark of our adoption. Now, the Spirit cannot be discerned in his essence, but in his operations; and to discern these is to discern the Spirit: and how these should be discerned without serious searching, and diligent watching of the heart, I cannot imagine.

2. The other way of the Spirit’s witnessing is effectively—that is, by irradiating the soul with a grace-discovering light, shining upon his own work; and this, in order of nature, follows the former work: he first infuses the grace, and then opens the eye of the soul to see it. Now, since the heart is the subject of that infused grace, even this way of the Spirit’s witnessing also includes the necessity of keeping carefully our own hearts: for,

First, A neglected heart is so confused and dark, that the little grace which is in it, is not ordinarily discernible. The most accurate and laborious Christians, that take most pains, and spend most time about their hearts, do yet find it very difficult to discover the pure and genuine workings of the Spirit there : how then shall the Christian, who is (comparatively) negligent and remiss about heart-work, be ever able to discover it ? Sincerity, which is the thing sought for, lies in the heart like a small piece of gold in the bottom of a river : he that will find it must stay till the water is clear and settled, and then he shall see it sparkling at the bottom ; and that the heart may be clear and settled, how much pains and watching, care and diligence will it cost ?

Second, God doth not usually indulge lazy and negligent souls with the comfort of assurance : he will not so much as seem to patronise sloth and carelessness : he will give it, but it shall be in his own way : his command hath united our care and comfort together : they are mistaken that think the beautiful child of assurance may be born without pangs. Ah ! how many solitary hours have the people of God spent in heart-examination ! how many times have they looked into the word, and then into their hearts ! Sometimes they thought they discovered sincerity, and were even ready to draw forth the triumphant conclusion of assurance ; then comes a doubt they cannot resolve, and dashes all again : many hopes and fears, doubtings and reasonings, they have had in their own breasts, before they arrived at a comfortable settlement.

To conclude : suppose it possible for a careless

Christian to attain assurance, yet it is impossible he should long retain it ; for, as for those whose hearts are filled with the joys of assurance, as with a pregnant woman subject to miscarriages, if extraordinary care be not used, it is a thousand to one if ever she embrace a living child : so it is here, a little pride, vanity, carelessness, dashes all that for which thou hast been labouring a long time in many a weary duty. Since, then, the joy of our life, the comfort of our souls, rises and falls with our diligence in this work, keep your hearts with all diligence.

(v.) The improvement of our graces depends upon the keeping of our hearts. I never knew grace thrive in a negligent and careless soul : the habits and roots of grace are planted in the heart ; and the deeper they are radicated there, the more thriving and flourishing grace is. We read of being “rooted in grace :” grace in the heart is the root of every gracious word in the mouth, and of every holy work in the hand, Psalm cxvi. 10. 2 Cor. iv. 13. It is true, Christ is the root of a Christian ; but Christ is the originating root, and grace a root originated, planted, and influenced by Christ : according as this thrives under divine influence, so the acts of grace are more or less fruitful or vigorous. Now, in a heart not kept with care and diligence, these fructifying influences are stopped and cut off, multitudes of vanities break in upon it, and devour its strength ; the heart is as it were the pasture, in which multitudes of thoughts are fed every day : a gracious heart diligently kept, feeds many precious thoughts of God in a day : “How precious are thy thoughts to me, O God ! How great is the sum of them ! If I

should count them, they are more in number than the sand ; and when I awake, I am still with thee." And as the gracious heart feeds and nourishes them, so they refresh and feast the heart : " My soul is filled as with marrow and fatness whilst I think upon thee," &c. But in the disregarded heart, swarms of vain and foolish thoughts are perpetually working, and jumble out those spiritual ideas and thoughts of God by which the soul should be refreshed.

Besides, the careless heart makes nothing out of any duty or ordinance it performs or attends on ; and yet these are the conduits of heaven, from whence grace is watered and made fruitful. A man may go with a heedless spirit from ordinance to ordinance, abide all his days under the choicest teaching, and yet never be improved by them ; for heart-neglect is a leak in the bottom : no heavenly influences, how rich soever, abide in that soul, Matt. xiii. 3, 4. The heart that lies open and common like the highway, free for all passengers, when the seed fell on it the fowls came and devoured it. Alas ! it is not enough to hear, unless we take heed how we hear : a man may pray, and never be the better, unless he watch unto prayer. In a word, all ordinances, means, and duties, are blessed unto the improvement of grace, according to the care and strictness we use in keeping our hearts in them.

(VI.) Lastly, The stability of our souls in the hour of temptation, will be much according to the care and conscience we have of keeping our hearts. The careless heart is an easy prey to Satan in the hour of temptation : his main batteries are raised against that fort-royal, the heart ; if he wins that, he wins all, for

it commands the whole man. And alas, how easy a conquest is a neglected heart ! It is no more difficult to surprise it, than for an enemy to enter that city whose gates are open and unguarded : it is the watchful heart that discovers and suppresses the temptation before it comes to its strength. Divines observe this to be the method in which temptations are ripened and brought to their full strength.

There is, 1. The irritation of the object, or that power it hath to work upon and provoke our corrupt nature, which is either done by the real presence of the object, or else by speculation, when the object (though absent) is held out by the phantasy before the soul.

2. Then follows the motion of the sensitive appetite, which is stirred and provoked by the phantasy, representing it as a sensual good, as having profit or pleasure in it.

3. Then there is a consultation in the mind about it, deliberating about the likeliest means of accomplishing it.

4. Next follows the election or choice of the will,

5. And, lastly, the desire or full engagement of the will to it.

All this may be done in a few moments ; for the debates of the soul are quick, and soon ended. When it comes thus far, when the heart is won, Satan hath entered victoriously, and displayed his colours upon the walls of that royal fort. But had the heart been well guarded at first, it had never come to this height, the temptation had been stopped in the first or second act : and indeed there it is stopped easily ; for it is in the motions of a tempted

soul to sin, as in the motion of a stone falling from the brow of a hill—it is easily stopped at first, but, when once it is set a-going, *Vires acquirit eundo*. And therefore, it is the greatest wisdom in the world to observe the first motions of the heart, to check and stop sin there. The motions of sin are weakest at first: a little care and watchfulness may prevent much mischief now, which the careless heart not heeding, is brought within the power of temptation, as the Syrians were brought blindfold into the midst of Samaria before they knew where they were.

By this time, reader, I hope thou art fully satisfied how consequential and necessary a work the keeping of thy heart is; it being a duty that wraps up so many dear interests of the soul in it.

III. Next, according to the method propounded, I proceed to point out those special seasons in the life of a Christian which require and call for our utmost diligence in keeping the heart: for though (as was observed before) the duty binds always, and there is no time or condition of life in which we may be excused from this work, yet there are some signal seasons, critical hours, requiring more than a common vigilance over the heart.

SEASON I. Is the time of prosperity, when providence smiles upon us, and dandles us upon its knee. Now, Christian, keep thy heart with all diligence; for now it will be exceeding apt to grow secure, proud, and earthly. Bernard saith, “To see a man humble under prosperity, is one of the greatest rarities in the world.” Even a good Hezekiah could not hide a vain-glorious temper under his temptation, and hence that

caution to Israel: "And it shall be when the Lord thy God shall have brought thee into the land which he sware to thy fathers, to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, to give the great and goodly cities which thou buildest not, and houses full of good things which thou filledst not," &c. Then beware lest thou forget the Lord; and indeed so it fell out, for "Jeshurun waxed fat and kicked."

Now then, the first case will be this, namely,

Case I. How a Christian may keep his heart from pride and carnal security, under the smiles of providence, and confluence of creature-comforts.

There are seven choice helps to secure the heart from the dangerous snares of prosperity,—the first is this:

1. To consider the dangerous, ensnaring temptations attending a pleasant and prosperous condition. Few, yea very few, of those that live in the pleasures and prosperity of this world, escape everlasting perdition. "It is easier," saith Christ, "for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of heaven;" and, "Not many mighty, not many noble are called." It might justly make us tremble when the Scripture tells us in general, that few shall be saved; much more when it tells us, that of that rank and sort of which we are speaking, but few shall be saved. When Joshua called all the tribes of Israel to lot upon them for the discovery of Achan, doubtless Achan feared; when the tribe of Judah was taken, his fear increased; but when the family of the Zarahites was taken, it was time then to tremble. So, when the Scripture comes so near as to tell us, that of such a sort of men very

few shall escape, it is time to look about: Chrysostom said, "I should wonder if any of the rulers be saved." Oh, how many have been coached to hell in the chariots of earthly pleasures, while others have been whipped to heaven by the rod of affliction! How few, like the daughter of Tyre, come to Christ with a gift! how few among the rich entreat his favour!

2. It may keep us yet more humble and watchful in prosperity, if we consider, that among Christians many have been much the worse for it. How good had it been for some of them if they had never known prosperity. When they were in a low condition, how humble, spiritual, and heavenly were they! but when advanced, what an apparent alteration hath been upon their spirits! It was so with Israel, when they were in a low condition in the wilderness: then Israel was "holiness to the Lord." But when they came into Canaan, and were fed in a fat pasture, then, "we are lords, we will come no more unto thee." Outward gains are ordinarily attended with inward losses: as in a low condition their civil employments were wont to have a savour of their duties, so in an exalted condition their duties commonly have a savour of the world. He indeed is rich in grace, whose graces are not hindered by his riches. There are but few Jehoshaphats in the world of whom it is said, "He had silver and gold in abundance, and his heart was lifted up in the way of God's commands." Will not this keep thy heart humble in prosperity, to think how dear many godly men have paid for their riches; that through them they have lost that which all the world cannot purchase? Then, in the next place,

3. Keep down thy vain heart by this considera-

tion, that God values not a man a jot the more for these things. God values no man by outward excellencies, but by inward graces: they are the internal ornaments of the spirit, which are of great price in God's eyes. He despises all worldly glory, and excepts no man's person; "but in every nation, he that feareth God, and worketh righteousness, is accepted of him." Indeed, if the judgment of God went by the same rule that man's doth, we might value ourselves by these things, and stand upon them. But as one said, when dying, "I shall not appear before God as a doctor, but as a man:" so much every man is, and no more, as he is in the judgment of God. Doth thy heart yet swell? and will either of the former considerations keep it humble?

4. Then fourthly, Consider how bitterly many persons have bewailed their folly when they came to die, that ever they set their hearts upon these things, and heartily wished that they had never known them. What a sad story was that of Pius Quintus, who, dying, cried out despairingly, 'When I was in a low condition, I had some hopes of salvation; but when I was advanced to be cardinal, I greatly doubted it; but since I came to the popedom, I have no hope at all.' Mr. Spencer also tells us a real, but sad story, of a rich oppressor, who had scraped up a great estate for his only son. When he came to die, he called his son to him, and said, Son, do you indeed love me? The son answered, That nature, besides his paternal indulgence, obliged him to that. Then, said the father, express it by this: hold thy finger in the candle as long as I am saying a *Pater Noster*. The son attempted, but could not endure it. Upon that the

father broke out into these expressions: Thou canst not suffer the burning of thy finger for me, but to get this wealth I have hazarded my soul for thee, and must burn body and soul in hell for thy sake; thy pain would have been but for a moment, but mine will be unquenchable fire.

5. The heart may be kept humble, by considering of what a clogging nature earthly things are to a soul heartily engaged in the way to heaven: they shut out much of heaven from us at present, though they may not shut us out of heaven at last. If thou consider thyself under the notion of a stranger in this world, travelling for heaven, and seeking a better country, thou hast then as much reason to be taken and delighted with these things, as a weary horse hath with a heavy cloak-bag. There was a serious truth in that atheistical scoff of Julian, when he took away the Christian's estates, and told them, it was to make them fitter for the kingdom of heaven.

6. Is thy spirit, for all this, flatulent and lofty? Then urge upon it the consideration of that awful day of reckoning, wherein, according to our receipts of mercies shall be our accounts for them: and methinks this should awe and humble the vainest heart that ever was in the breast of a saint. Know for certain, that the Lord records all the mercies that ever he gave thee, from the beginning to the end of thy life: "Remember, O my people, from Shittim unto Gilgal," &c. Yea, they are exactly numbered and recorded, in order to an account; and thy account will be suitable—"To whomsoever much is given, of him much shall be required." You are but stewards, and your Lord will come to take an account of you. And

what a great account have you to make, who have much of this world in your hand ! What swift witnesses will your mercies be against you, if this be the best fruits of them !

7. It is a very humbling consideration, that the mercies of God should work otherwise upon my spirit than they use to do upon the spirits of others, to whom they come as sanctified mercies from the love of God. Ah, Lord, what a sad consideration is this ! Enough to lay me in the dust ; when I consider,

1st, That their mercies have greatly humbled them : the higher God has raised them, the lower they have laid themselves before God. Thus did Jacob when God had given him much substance : “ And Jacob said, I am not worthy of the least of all thy mercies, and of all the truth which thou hast showed unto thy servant, for with my staff I passed over this Jordan, and now I am become two bands.” And thus it was with holy David. When God had confirmed the promise to him, to build him a house, and not reject him as he did Saul, he goes in before the Lord, and saith, “ Who am I ? and what is my father’s house, that thou hast brought me hitherto ?” And so indeed God required. When Israel was to bring to God the first-fruits of Canaan, they were to say, “ A Syrian, ready to perish, was my father,” &c. Do others raise God the higher for the raising them ? And the more God raises me, the more shall I abuse him and exalt myself ? Oh what a sad thing is this !

2d, Others have freely ascribed the glory of all their enjoyments to God, and magnified not themselves, but him, for their mercies : so David said, “ Let thy name be magnified, and the house of thy

servant be established.” He doth not fly upon the mercy, and suck out the sweetness of it, looking no farther than his own comfort: no, he cares for no mercy except God be magnified in it. So, when God had delivered him from all his enemies, “The Lord,” saith he, “is my strength and my rock, he is become my salvation.” They did not put the crown upon their own heads as I do.

3d, The mercies of God hath been melting mercies unto others, melting their souls in love to the God of their mercies. So Hannah, when she received the mercy of a son—“My soul,” saith she, “rejoiceth in the Lord; not in the mercy, but in the God of the mercy:” and so Mary said, “My soul doth magnify the Lord, my spirit rejoiceth in God my Saviour.” The word signifies, to ‘make more room’ for God; their hearts were not contracted, but the more enlarged to God.

4th, The mercies of God have been mighty restraints to keep others from sin. “Seeing thou our God hast given us such a deliverance as this, should we again break thy commandments?” Ingenuous souls have felt the force of the obligations of love and mercy upon them.

5th, To conclude: the mercies of God to others have been as oil to the wheels of their obedience, and made them fitter for service, 2 Chron. xvii. 5. Now, if mercies work contrarily upon my heart, what cause have I to be afraid that they come not to me in love? I tell you, this is enough to damp the spirit of any saint, to see what sweet effects they have had on others, and what sad effects on him.

SEASON II. The second special season in the

life of a Christian, requiring more than a common diligence to keep his heart, is the time of adversity. When providence frowns upon you, and blasts your outward comforts, then look to your hearts, keep them with all diligence from repining against God, or fainting under his hand; for troubles, though sanctified, are troubles still, even sweet-brier and holly thistles have their prickles. Jonah was a good man, and yet how pettish was his heart under affliction! Job was the mirror of patience, yet how was his heart discomposed by trouble! You will find it as hard to get a composed spirit under great afflictions, as it is to fix quicksilver. Oh the hurries and tumults which they occasion even in the best hearts! Well then, the second case will be this:

Case II. How a Christian, under great afflictions, may keep his heart from repining or desponding under the hand of God. Now, there are nine special helps I shall here offer to keep thy heart in this condition; and the first shall be this, to work upon your hearts this great truth—

Help 1. That by these cross providences, God is faithfully pursuing the great design of electing love upon the souls of his people, and orders all these afflictions as means sanctified to that end.

Afflictions fall not out by casualty, but by counsel, Job v. 6. Eph. i. 11. By this counsel of God they are ordained as means of much spiritual good to saints. “By this therefore shall the iniquity of Jacob be purged,” &c. Isa. xxvii. 9. “But he for our profit,” &c. Heb. xii. 10. “All things work together for good,” Rom. viii. 28. They are God’s workmen upon our hearts, to pull down the pride and

carnal security of them ; and being so, their nature is changed : they are turned into blessings and benefits. “ It is good for me that I have been afflicted.” And surely then, thou hast no reason to quarrel with, but rather to admire that God should concern himself so much in thy good, to use any means for the accomplishing of it. Paul could bless God, “ if by any means he might attain the resurrection of the dead.” “ My brethren,” saith James, “ count it all joy when you fall into divers temptations.” My father is about a design of love upon my soul, and do I well to be angry with him ? All that he doth is in pursuance of, and in reference to, some eternal glorious ends upon my soul. Oh, it is my ignorance of God’s design, that makes me quarrel with him ! He saith to thee in this case, as to Peter, “ What I do thou knowest not now, but hereafter thou shalt know it.”

Help 2. Though God hath reserved to himself a liberty of afflicting his people, yet he hath tied up his own hands by promise, never to take away his loving-kindness from them. Can I look that Scripture in the face with a repining discontented spirit, “ I shall be his father, and he will be my son : if he commit iniquity, I will chasten him with the rod of men, and with the stripes of the children of men ; nevertheless my mercy shall not depart away from him.” O my heart, my haughty heart ! dost thou well to be discontented, when God hath given thee the whole tree, with all the clusters of comfort growing on it, because he suffers the wind to blow down a few leaves ? Christians have two sorts of goods—the goods of the throne, and the goods of the footstool ; moveables and immoveables. If God have se-

cured these, never let my heart be troubled at the loss of those. Indeed, if he had cut off his love, or discovenanted my soul, I had reason to be cast down; but this he hath not, nor can he do it.

Help 3. It is of marvellous efficacy to keep the heart from sinking under affliction, to call to mind that thine own Father hath the ordering of them: not a creature moves hand or tongue against thee, but by his permission. Suppose the cup be a bitter cup, yet it is the cup which thy Father hath given thee to drink; and canst thou suspect poison to be in that cup which he delivers thee? Foolish man! put home the case to thine own heart, consult with thine own bowels: canst thou find in thy heart to give thy child that which would hurt or undo him? No, thou wouldst as soon hurt thyself as him: "If thou then being evil, knowest how to give good gifts to thy children," how much more doth God? The very consideration of his nature—a God of love, pity, and tender mercies—or of his relation to thee, as a father, husband, friend; might be security enough, if he had not spoken a word to quiet thee in this case; and yet you have his word too: "I will do you no hurt." You lie too near his heart to hurt you: nothing grieves him more than your groundless and unworthy suspicions of his designs do. Would it not grieve a faithful tender-hearted physician, when he hath studied the case of his patient, prepared the most excellent receipts to save his life, to hear him cry out: "Oh he hath undone me, he hath poisoned me;" because it gripes and pains him in the operation? Oh, when will you be ingenuous!

Help 4. God respects you as much in a low, as

in a high condition; and therefore, it need not so much trouble you to be made low: nay, to speak home, he manifests more of his love, grace, and tenderness, in the time of affliction than prosperity. As God did not at first choose you because you were high, so he will not forsake you because you are low. Men may look shy upon you, and alter their respects as your condition is altered. When providence hath blasted your estates, your summer friends may grow strange, as fearing you may be troublesome to them; but will God do so? No, no: I will “never leave thee nor forsake thee.” Indeed, if adversity and poverty could bar you from access to God, it were a sad condition; but you may go to God as freely as ever: “My God,” saith the church, “will hear me.” Poor David, when stripped of all earthly comforts, could yet encourage himself in the Lord his God, and why cannot you? Suppose your husband or child had lost all at sea, and should come to you in rags; could you deny the relation, or refuse to entertain him? If you would not, much less will God. Why then are you so troubled? though your condition be changed, your Father’s love and respects are not changed.

Help 5. And what if, by the loss of outward comforts, God will preserve your souls from the ruining power of temptation—surely then you have little cause to sink your hearts by such sad thoughts about them. Are not these earthly enjoyments the things that make men shrink and warp in times of trial? For the love of these, many have forsaken Christ in such an hour: “He went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions.” And if this be God’s design,

what have I done in quarrelling with him about it? We see mariners in a storm can throw overboard rich bales of silk, and precious things, to preserve the vessel and their lives with it, and every one saith they act prudently. We know it is usual for soldiers, in a city besieged, to batter down and burn the fairest buildings without the walls, in which the enemy may shelter in the siege, and no man doubts but it is wisely done. Such as have gangrened legs or arms, can willingly stretch them out to be cut off, and not only thank, but pay the chirurgeon for his pains. And must God be repined at for casting over what would sink you in a storm? for pulling down that which would advantage your enemy in the siege of temptation? for cutting off what would endanger your everlasting life? O inconsiderate, ungrateful man! Are not these things for which thou grievest, the very things that have ruined thousands of souls? Well, what Christ doth in this thou knowest not now, but hereafter thou mayest.

Help 6. It would much stay the heart under adversity, to consider, that God, by such humbling providences, may be accomplishing that joy for which you have long prayed and waited; and should you be troubled at that? Say, Christian, hast thou not many prayers depending before God upon such accounts as these,—that he would kill and mortify thy lusts; that thy heart may never find rest in any enjoyment but Christ? Why now, by such humbling and impoverishing strokes, God may be fulfilling thy desires. Wouldst thou be kept from sin? Lo, “he hath hedged up thy way with thorns.” Wouldst thou see the creature’s vanity? Thy affliction is a fair

glass to discover it; for the vanity of the creature is never so effectually and sensibly discovered, as in our own experience of it. Wouldst thou have thy corruptions mortified? 'This is the way—now God takes away the food and fuel that maintained them; for, as prosperity begat and fed them, so adversity, when sanctified, is a means to kill them. Wouldst thou have thy heart to rest no where but in the bosom of God? What better way canst thou imagine Providence should take to accomplish thy desire, than by pulling from under thy head that soft pillow of creature-delights on which thou restedst before? And yet you fret at this. Peevish child! how dost thou exercise thy Father's patience! If he delay to answer thy prayers, thou art ready to say, he regards thee not. If he do that which really answers the scope and main end of them, but not in the way thou expectedst, thou quarrellest with him for that, as if, instead of answering, he were crossing all thy hopes and aims. Is this ingenuous? Is it not enough, that God is so gracious to do what thou desirest, but thou must be so imprudent to expect he should do it in the way which thou prescribest?

Help 7. Again, it may stay thy heart, if thou consider, that in these troubles God is about that work which, if thou didst see the design of, thy soul would rejoice. We poor creatures are bemisted with much ignorance, and are not able to discern how particular providences work toward God's end; and therefore, like Israel in the wilderness, are often murmuring, because Providence leads us about in a howling desert, where we are exposed to straits; though yet, then he led them, and is now leading us,

“by the right way to a city of habitations.” If you could but see how God, in his secret counsel, hath exactly laid the whole plot and design of thy salvation, even to the smallest means and circumstances : This way, and by these means, such a one shall be saved, and by no other : such a number of afflictions I appoint for this man, at this time, and in this order : they shall befall him thus, and thus they shall work for him ;—could you, I say, but discern the admirable harmony of divine dispensations, their mutual relations to each other, together with the general respect and influence they all have to the last end—of all the conditions in the world, you would choose that you are now in, had you liberty to make your own choice. Providence is like a curious piece of arras, made up of a thousand shreds, which, single, we know not what to make of ; but put together, and stitched up orderly, they represent a beautiful history to the eye. As God works all things according to the counsel of his own will, so that counsel of God hath ordained this as the best way to bring about thy salvation : Such a one hath a proud heart ; so many humbling providences I appoint for him : such a one an earthly heart ; so many impoverishing providences for him. Did you but see this, I need say no more to support the most dejected heart.

Help 8. Farther, it would much conduce to the settlement of your hearts, to consider, That by fretting and discontent you do yourselves more injury than all the afflictions you lie under could do. Your own discontent is that which arms your troubles with a sting ; it is you that makes your burden heavy, by struggling under it : could you but lie quiet under

the hand of God, your condition would be much easier and sweeter than it is. This makes God lay on more strokes, as a father will upon a stubborn child that receives not correction.

Besides, it unfits the soul to pray over its troubles, or take in the sense of that good which God intends by them. Affliction is a pill, which, being wrapt up in patience and quiet submission, may be easily swallowed: but discontent chews the pill, and so imbitters the soul. God throws away some comfort which he saw would hurt you, and you will throw away your peace after it; he shoots an arrow which sticks in your clothes, and was never intended to hurt, but only to frighten you from sin; and you will thrust it onward to the piercing of your very hearts by despondency and discontent.

Help 9. Lastly, If all this will not do, but thy heart, like Rachel, still refuses to be comforted or quieted, then consider one thing more, which, if seriously pondered, will doubtless do the work, and that is this: Compare the condition thou art now in, and art so much dissatisfied with, with that condition others are, and thyself deservest to be in. Others are roaring in flames, howling under the scourge of vengeance, and amongst them I deserve to be. O my soul, is this hell? Is my condition as bad as the damned? O what would thousands now in hell give to change conditions with me! It is a famous instance which Dr. Taylor* gives us of the duke of Conde: "I have read," saith he, "that when the duke of Conde had entered voluntarily

* Great Exemp. p. 310.

into the incommodities of a religious poverty, he was one day espied and pitied by a lord of Italy, who, out of tenderness, wished him to be more careful and nutritive of his person. The good duke answered, Sir, be not troubled, and think not that I am ill provided of conveniences, for I send a harbinger before me, who makes ready my lodgings, and takes care that I be royally entertained. The lord asked him who was his harbinger? He answered, the knowledge of myself, and the consideration of what I deserve for my sins, which is eternal torments; and when with this knowledge I arrive at my lodging, how unprovided soever I find it, methinks it is ever better than I deserve." "Why doth the living man complain?" And thus the heart may be kept from desponding or repining under adversity.

SEASON III. The third season calling for more than ordinary diligence to keep the heart, is the time of Sion's troubles. When the church, like the ship in which Christ and his disciples were, is oppressed and ready to perish in the waves of persecution, then good souls are ready to sink, and be shipwrecked too upon the billows of their own fears. I confess, most men rather need the spur than the reins in this case, and yet some sit down as overweighed with the sense of the church's troubles. The loss of the ark cost old Eli his life; the sad posture Jerusalem lay in, made good Nehemiah's countenance change in the midst of all the pleasures and accommodations of the court. Ah! this goes close to honest hearts.

But though God allow, yea, command the most awakened apprehensions of these calamities, and in

such a day calls to “mourning, weeping, and girding with sackcloth,” and severely threatens the insensible; yet it will not please him to see you sit like pensive Elijah under the juniper tree, “Ah! Lord God, it is enough, take away my life also:” no, mourners in Sion you may and ought to be, but self-tormentors you must not be; complain to God you may, but to complain of God, though by an unsuitable carriage, and the language of your actions, you must not.

Case III. The third case that comes next to be spoken to is this: How public and tender hearts may be relieved and supported when they are even overweighed with the burdensome sense of Sion’s troubles.—I grant it is hard for him that preferreth Sion to his chief joy, to keep his heart that it sink not below the due sense of its troubles, and yet this ought and may be done by the use of such heart-establishing directions as these:—

Direct. 1. Settle this great truth in your hearts, that no trouble befalls Sion but by the permission of Sion’s God; and he permits nothing out of which he will not bring much good at last to his people.

There is truly a principle of quietness in the permitting, as in the commanding will of God. See it in David: “Let him alone, it may be God hath bidden him.” And in Christ: “Thou couldst have no power against me, except it were given thee from above.” It should much calm our spirits, that it is the will of God to suffer it; and had he not suffered it, could never have been as it is.

This very consideration quieted Job, Eli, David,

and Hezekiah; that the Lord did it was enough to them. And why should it not be so to us? If the Lord will have Sion ploughed as a field, and her goodly stones lie in the dust; if it be his pleasure that Antichrist shall rage yet longer, and wear out the saints of the Most High; if it be his will, that a day of trouble, and of treading down, and of perplexity, by the Lord God of hosts, shall be upon the valley of vision; that the wicked shall devour the man that is more righteous than he—what are we that we should contest with God? Fit it is that we should be resigned up to that will whence we proceeded; and that he that made us should dispose of us as he pleaseth. He may do what seemeth him good without our consent. Doth poor man stand upon equal ground that he should capitulate with his Creator, or that God should render him an account of any of his matters? It is every way as reasonable we be content however God dispose of us, as that we be obedient to whatever he commands us.

But then, if we pursue this argument farther, by considering that God's permissions do all meet at last in the real good of his people, this will much more quiet our spirits. Do the enemies carry away the good figs, even the best among the people, into captivity? This looks like a sad providence; but yet God sends them thither for their good. Doth God take the Assyrians as a staff in his hand to beat his people with? Those blows are smart, and make them cry; but the end of his so doing is, "that he may accomplish his whole work upon mount Sion." If God can bring much good out of the worst and greatest evil of sin, much more out of temporal af-

flections ; and it is as evident that he will, as that he can do so. For it is inconsistent with the wisdom of a common agent, to permit any thing (which he might prevent if he please) to cross his great design and end ; and can it be imagined that the most wise God should do so ?

Well then, as Luther told Melancthon, *Desinat Philippus esse rector mundi* ; so say I to you, let infinite wisdom, power, and love alone—for by these all creatures are swayed, and actions guided, in reference to the church. It is none of our work to rule the world, but to submit to him that doth ; the motions of providence are all judicious, the wheels are full of eyes : it is enough that the affairs of Sion are in a good hand.

Direct. 2. Ponder this heart-supporting truth, in reference to Sion's trouble, 'That how many troubles soever are upon her, yet her King is in her.

What ! hath the Lord forsaken his churches ? hath he sold them into the enemy's hand ? doth he not regard what evil befalls them ? that our hearts sink at this rate. Is it not too shameful an undervaluing of the great God, and too much magnifying of poor impotent men, to fear and tremble at creatures, whilst God is in the midst of us ? 'The church's enemies are many and mighty—let that be granted ; yet that argument with which Caleb and Joshua strove to raise their own hearts, is of as much force now as it was then : " The Lord is with us ; fear them not." The historian tells us, that when Antigonus overheard his soldiers reckoning how many their enemies were, and so discouraging one another, he suddenly steps in among them with this question,

“And how many,” said he, “do you reckon me for?” Discouraged souls ! how many do you reckon the Lord for ? Is he not an overmatch for all his enemies ? Is not one Almighty more than many mighties ? Doth his presence stand for nothing with us ? “If God be for us, who can be against us ?” What think you was the reason of that great exploration Gideon made in Judges vi. ? He questions, ver. 12, 13. ; he desires a sign, ver. 17. ; and after that another, ver. 36. And what was the end of all this, but that he might but write this motto upon his ensign, “The sword of the Lord and of Gideon ?” So then, if you can be well assured the Lord is with his people, you will get thereby above all your discouragements : and that he is so, you need not, with him, divine a sign from heaven ; lo, you have a sign before you, even their marvellous preservation amidst all their enemies. If God be not with his people, how is it they are not swallowed up ? Do their enemies want malice, power, or opportunity ? No ; but there is an invisible hand upon them. Well then, as it is, let his presence give us rest ; and though the mountains be hurled into the sea, though heaven and earth mingle together, fear not, God is in the midst of her, she shall not be moved.

Direct. 3. Ponder the great advantages attending the people of God in an afflicted condition.—If a low and an afflicted state in the world be really best for the church, then your dejections are not only irrational, but ungrateful. Indeed, if you estimate the happiness of the church by its worldly ease, splendour, and prosperity, then such times will seem bad for it ; but if you reckon its glory to consist in its

humility, faith, patience, and heavenly-mindedness, no condition in the world abounds with advantages for these as an afflicted condition doth. It was not persecutions and prisons, but worldliness and wantonness, that was the poison of the church; neither was it the earthly glory of its professors, but the blood of its martyrs, that was the seed of the church. The power of godliness did never thrive better than in affliction, and never ran lower than in times of greatest prosperity: “When we are left a poor and an afflicted people, then we learn to trust in the name of the Lord.” What say ye, sirs? Is it indeed for the saints’ advantage to be weaned from the loves and delights of ensnaring worldly vanities—to be quickened and pricked forward with more haste to heaven—to have clearer discoveries of their own hearts—to be taught to pray more fervently, frequently, spiritually—to look and long for the rest to come more ardently? If these be for their advantage, experience teacheth us, that no condition is ordinarily blessed with such fruits as these like an afflicted condition.

And is it well done, then, to repine and droop, because your Father consults more the advantage of your souls than the pleasing of your humours—because he will bring you a nearer way to heaven than you are willing to go? Is this a due requital of his love, who is pleased so much to concern himself in your welfare? which is more than he will do for thousands in the world, upon whom he will not lay a rod, or spend an affliction for their good. But, alas! we judge by sense, and reckon things good or evil according to what we for the present can taste and feel in them.

Direct. 4. Take heed that you overlook not the many precious mercies which the people of God enjoy amidst all their troubles.—It is a pity that our tears, upon the account of our troubles, should so blind our eyes that we should not see our mercies and grounds of comfort. I will not insist upon the mercy of having your lives given you for a prey, nor yet upon the many outward comforts, temporal conveniences and accommodations, which you enjoy, even above what Christ and his precious servants, of whom the world was not worthy, ever had.

But what say you to pardon of sin, interest in Christ, the covenant of promise, and an eternity of happiness in the presence of God after a few days are over? O that ever a people entitled to such mercies as these, should droop under any temporal affliction, or be so much concerned for the frowns of men and loss of trifles! You have not the smiles of great men, but you have the favour of the great God. You are, it may be, cast back in your estates, but thereby furthered in spirituals. You cannot live so plentifully and easily as before, but still you may live as holy and heavenly as ever. Will you then grieve so much for these circumstantial, as to forget your substantial? Shall light troubles make you forget weighty mercies? Remember, the church's true riches are laid out of the reach of all its enemies: they may make you poor, but not miserable. What though God do not distinguish, in his outward dispensations, betwixt his own and others? Yea, what though his judgment single out the best, and spare the worst? What though an Abel be killed in love, and a Cain survive in hatred; a bloody Dionysius die in his bed,

and a good Josiah fall in battle? What though the belly of the wicked be filled with hid treasures, and the teeth of the saints broken with gravel stones? Yet still here is much matter of praise: for electing love has distinguished, though common providences did not; and whilst prosperity and impunity slay the wicked, even slaying and adversity shall benefit and save the righteous.

Direct. 5. Believe that how low soever the church be plunged under the waters of adversity, it shall assuredly rise again.—Fear not; for as sure as Christ arose the third day, notwithstanding the seal and watch that was upon him, so sure the church shall arise out of all her troubles, and lift up its victorious head over all its enemies. There is no fear of ruining that people that thrive by their losses, and multiply by being diminished. O be not too quick to bury the church before she is dead! Stay till Christ hath tried his skill, before you give it up for lost. The bush may be all in a flame, but shall never be consumed, and that because of the good-will of him that dwelleth in it.

Direct. 6. Record the famous instances of God's care and tenderness over his people in former straits.—Christ hath not suffered it to be devoured yet, for above these 1700 years the Christian church hath lived in affliction, and yet it is not consumed: many a wave of persecution hath gone over it, and yet it is not drowned; many designs to ruin it, and hitherto none hath prospered. This is not the first time that Hamans and Ahithophels have plotted its ruin; that a Herod hath stretched out his hand to vex it: still it hath been preserved from, supported under, or de-

livered out of all its troubles. And is it not as dear to God as ever? Is he not as able to save it now as formerly? Though we know not whence deliverance should arise, “yet the Lord knoweth how to deliver the godly out of temptation.”

Direct. 7. If you can fetch no comfort from any of the former arguments, then, in the last place, try whether you cannot draw some comfort out of your very trouble.—Surely this trouble of yours is a good argument of your integrity; union is the ground of sympathy: if you had not some rich adventure in that ship, you would not tremble as you do when it is in danger. Besides, this frame of spirit may afford you this argument, that if you are sensible of the church’s troubles, Jesus Christ is much more sensible of, and solicitous about it than you can be, and he will have an eye of favour upon them that mourn for it, Isa. lvii. 18.

SEASON IV. The fourth special season of expressing our utmost diligence in keeping our hearts, is the time of danger and public distraction. In such times the best hearts are but too apt to be surprised by slavish fear; it is not easy to secure the heart against distraction in times of common destruction. If Syria be confederate with Ephraim, how do the hearts of the house of David shake, “even as the trees of the wood which are shaken with the wind?” When there are ominous signs in the heavens, “on the earth distress of nations, with perplexity, the sea and waves roaring, then the hearts of men fail for fear, and for looking after those things which are coming on the earth.” Even as Paul himself may sometimes complain of fightings within, when there are fears without, 2 Cor. vii. 5.

But, my brethren, these things ought not to be so ; saints should be of a more raised spirit. So was David when his heart was kept in a good frame : “ The Lord is my light and my salvation, whom shall I fear ? The Lord is the strength of my life, of whom shall I be afraid ? ” Let none but the servants of sin be the slaves of fear : let them that have delighted in evil, fear evil : O let not that which God hath threatened as a judgment upon the wicked, ever seize upon the breasts of the righteous : “ I will send,” saith God,” faintness into their hearts in the land of their enemies, and the sound of a shaking leaf shall chase them.” O what poor-spirited men are these to fly at a shaking leaf ! which makes a pleasant, and not a terrible noise, and is in itself a kind of natural music : but to a guilty conscience, the whistling leaves are drums and trumpets. “ But God hath not given us the spirit of fear, but of love and of a sound mind.” A sound mind, as it stands there in opposition to the spirit of fear, is an unwounded conscience, not infirmed by guilt : and this should make a man as bold as a lion. I know it cannot be said of a saint, what God spake of Leviathan, that he is made without fear. There is a natural fear in every man, and it is as impossible to be wholly put off, as the body itself is. It is a perturbation of the mind rising from the apprehension of approaching danger ; and as long as dangers can approach us, we shall find some perturbations within us. It is not my purpose to commend to you a stoical apathy, nor yet to take you off from such a degree of cautional preventive fear as may fit you for trouble, and be serviceable to your souls. There is a provi-

dent fear that opens our eyes to foresee danger, and quickens to a prudent and lawful use of means to prevent it: such was Jacob's fear, Gen. xxxii. 7, 9, 10, &c. But it is the fear of diffidence. I persuade you to keep your hearts from that tyrannical passion which invades the heart in times of danger; distracts, weakens, and unfits the heart for duty; drives men upon unlawful means, and brings a snare with it. Well then, the fourth case will be this:

Case IV. How a Christian may keep his heart from distracting and tormenting fears in times of great and threatening dangers.

Now, there are fourteen excellent rules or helps for the keeping the heart from sinful fear when imminent dangers threaten us; and the first is this—

Rule 1. Look upon all the creatures as in the hand of God, who manages them in all their motions; limiting, restraining, and determining them all at his pleasure.

Get this truth well settled by faith in your hearts, it will marvellously guard them against slavish fears. The first chapter of Ezekiel contains an admirable scheme or draught of providence. There you may see the living creatures who move the wheels, namely, the great affairs and turnings of things here below, coming unto Christ, who sits upon the throne, to receive new orders and instructions from him, ver. 24. 25, 26.; and in Rev. vi. you may read of white, black, and red horses, which are nothing else but the instruments which God employs in executing his judgments in the world, as wars, pestilence, and death: but when these horses are prancing and trampling up and down the world, here is that may

quiet our hearts, that God hath the reins in his hand. Wicked men are sometimes like mad horses, they would stamp the people of God under their feet, but that the bridle of providence is in their lips. A lion at liberty is terrible to meet, but who is afraid of the lion in the keeper's hand?

Rule 2. Remember that this God, in whose hand all the creatures are, is your Father, and is much more tender over you, than you are or can be over yourselves: "He that toucheth you, toucheth the apple of mine eye."—Let me ask the most timorous woman, whether there be not a vast difference between the sight of a drawn sword in the hand of a bloody Russian, and the same sword in the hand of their own tender husband? As great a difference there is in looking upon creatures by an eye of sense, and looking on them as in the hand of your God by an eye of faith: that is a sweet scripture to this purpose—"Thy Maker is thine husband, the Lord of Hosts is his name:" he is Lord of all the hosts of creatures in the world. Who would be afraid to pass through an army, though all the soldiers should turn their swords and guns towards him, if the general of that army were his friend or father? I have met with an excellent story of a religious young man, who being at sea with many other passengers in a great storm, and they being half dead with fear, he only was observed to be very cheerful, as if he had been but little concerned in that danger. One of them demanding the reason of his cheerfulness, "Oh," said he, "it is because the pilot of the ship is my father." Consider Christ, first, as the King and supreme Lord over the providential kingdom; and then,

as your Head, Husband and Friend, and thou wilt quickly say, "Return unto thy rest, O my soul." This truth will make you cease trembling, and cause you to sing in the midst of dangers: "The Lord is king of all the earth, sing ye praise with understanding;" or, as the Hebrew word is, "every one that hath understanding;" namely, of this heart-reviving and establishing doctrine of the dominion of our Father over all the creatures.

Rule 3. Urge upon your hearts the express prohibitions of Christ in this case; and let your hearts stand in awe of the violations of them.

He hath charged you not to fear: "When ye shall hear of wars and commotions, see that you be not terrified." And, "In nothing be terrified by your adversaries." Yea, in Matth. x. 26, 28. 31. and within the compass of six verses, our Saviour commands us thrice, "not to fear man." Doth every big word of proud dust and ashes make thee afraid? Doth the voice of a man make thee tremble? And shall not the voice of God? If thou art of such a fearful and timorous spirit, how is it that thou fearest not to disobey the plain commands of Jesus Christ? Methinks the command of Christ should have as much power to calm, as the voice of a poor worm to terrify thy heart: "I, even I, am he that comforteth you: who art thou, that thou shouldst be afraid of a man that shall die, and of the son of man that shall be made as the grass, and forgettest the Lord thy Maker?" We cannot fear creatures sinfully, till we have forgotten God: did we remember what he is, and what he hath said, we should not be of such feeble spirits. Bring thy heart then to this dilemma

in times of danger : If I let into my heart the slavish fear of man, I must let out the reverential awe and fear of God ; and dare I cast off the fear of the Almighty for the frowns of a man ? shall I lift up proud dust above the great God ? shall I run upon a certain sin, to shun a probable danger ? Oh, keep thy heart by this consideration.

Rule 4. Remember how much needless trouble your vain fears have brought upon you formerly, and how you have disquieted yourselves to no purpose : “ And hast feared continually because of the oppressor, as if he were ready to devour : and where is the fury of the oppressor ? ” He seemed ready to devour, but yet you are not devoured : I have not brought upon you the thing that ye feared : you have wasted your spirits, disordered your souls, and weakened your hands, and all this to no purpose. You might have all this while enjoyed your peace, and possessed your souls in patience. And here I cannot but observe a very deep policy of Satan, managing a design against the soul by these vain fears. I call them vain in regard of the frustration of them by providence ; but certainly they are not in vain as to the end Satan aims at in raising them ; for herein he acts as soldiers use to do in the siege of a garrison, who, on purpose to wear out the besieged by constant watchings, and thereby unfit them to make resistance when they storm it in earnest, do every night give them false alarms, which, though they come to nothing, yet do notably serve this further design of the enemy. O when will you beware of Satan’s devices !

Rule 5. Consider solemnly, that though the things you fear should really fall out, yet there is more evil in your own fear than in the thing feared.

And that, not only as the least evil of sin is worse than the greatest evil of suffering ; but as this sinful fear hath really more torment and trouble in it, than is in that condition you are so much afraid of. Fear is both a multiplying and a tormenting passion ; it represents troubles much greater than they are, and so tortures and racks the soul much worse than when the suffering itself comes. So it was with Israel at the Red Sea : they cried out, and were sore afraid till they put foot into the water, and then a passage was opened through those waters which they thought would have drowned them. Thus it is with us : we, looking through the glass of carnal fear upon the waters of trouble, the swellings of Jordan, cry out, O they are unfordable ! we must needs perish in them. But when we come into the midst of those floods indeed, we find the promise made good : “ God will make a way to escape.” Thus it was with blessed Bilney, when he would make a trial, by putting his finger to the candle ; and not able to endure that, he cried out, What ! cannot I bear the burning of a finger ? how then shall I be able to bear the burning of my whole body to-morrow ? And yet, when that morrow came, he could go cheerfully into the flames, with that scripture in his mouth : “ Fear not : for I have redeemed thee, I have called thee by thy name ; thou art mine. When thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee : when thou walkest through the fire, thou shalt not be burnt.”

Rule 6. Consult the many precious promises which are written for your support and comfort in all dangers.

These are your refuges, to which you may fly and be safe : “ When the arrows of danger fly by night,

and destruction wasteth at noon-day." There are particular promises suited to particular cases and exigencies; and there are general promises, reaching all cases and conditions: such as these—"All things shall work together for good," &c. And, "Though a sinner do evil an hundred times, and his days be prolonged, yet it shall be well with them that fear the Lord," &c. Could you but believe the promises, your hearts should be established. Could you but plead them with God as Jacob did: "Thou saidst, I will surely do thee good," &c. they would relieve you in every distress.

Obj. But that promise was made personally, and by name, to him: so are not these to me.

Ans. If Jacob's God be your God, you have as good an interest in them as he had. The church, a thousand years after that transaction betwixt God and Jacob, applied that which God spake to him, as if it had been spoken to themselves: "He found him in Bethel, and there he spake with us."

Rule 7. Quiet your trembling hearts by recording and consulting your past experiences of the care and faithfulness of God in former distresses.

These experiences are food for your faith in a wilderness condition. By this David kept his heart in time of danger, 1 Sam. xvii. 37. and Paul his, 2 Cor. i. 10. It was sweetly answered by Silentarius, when one told him, that his enemies way-laid him to take away his life,—'If God take no care of me, how have I escaped hitherto?' You may plead with God old experiences to procure new ones; for it is in pleading with God for new deliverances, as it is in pleading for new pardons. Now mark how Moses

pleads on that account with God—"Pardon, I beseech thee, the iniquity of this people, as thou hast forgiven them from Egypt until now." He doth not say as men do—Lord, this is the first fault, thou hast not been troubled before to sign their pardon: but, Lord, because thou hast pardoned them so often, I beseech thee pardon them once again. So in new straits—Lord, thou hast often heard, helped, and saved in former years, therefore now help again, for with thee there is plenteous redemption, and thine arm is not shortened.

Rule 8. Be well satisfied that you are in the way of your duty, and that will beget holy courage in times of danger.

"Who will harm you if you be followers of that which is good?" Or, if any dare attempt it, "you may boldly commit yourselves to God in well-doing." It was this consideration that raised Luther's spirit above all fear: "In the cause of God," said he, "I ever am, and ever shall be stout: herein I assume this title, *Cedo nulli*,—a good cause will bear up a man's spirit bravely. Hear the saying of a heathen, to the shame of cowardly Christians:—When the emperor Vespasian had commanded Fluidius Priscus * not to come to the senate, or if he did, to speak nothing but what he would have him, the senator returned this noble answer, "That as he was a senator, it was fit he should be at the senate; and if being there he were required to give his advice, he would speak freely that which his conscience commanded him." The emperor threatening that then he should die,

* Char. of Wisdom, p. 358.

he answered, " Did I ever tell you that I was immortal? Do you what you will, and I will do what I ought: it is in your power to put me to death unjustly, and in me to die constantly."

Righteousness is a breast-plate; the cause of God will pay all your expenses: let them tremble whom danger finds out of the way of duty.

Rule 9. Get your consciences sprinkled with the blood of Christ from all guilt, and that will set your hearts above all fear.

It is guilt upon the conscience that softens and cowardizes our spirits: the righteous are bold as a lion. It was guilt in Cain's conscience that made him cry, " Every one that meets me shall slay me." A guilty conscience is more terrified with conceited dangers, than a pure conscience is with real ones. A guilty sinner carries a witness against himself in his own bosom. It was guilty Herod cried out, " John the Baptist is risen from the dead." Such a conscience is the devil's anvil, on which he fabricates all those swords and spears with which the guilty sinner pierces and wounds himself. Guilt is to danger, what fire is to gunpowder: a man need not fear to walk among many barrels of powder if he have no fire about him.

Rule 10. Exercise holy trust in times of great distress.

Make it your business to trust God with your lives and comforts, and then your hearts will be at rest about them. So did David: " At what time I am afraid, I will trust in thee:" *q. d.* Lord, if at any time a storm rise, I will make bold to shelter from it under the covert of thy wings. Go to God by acts

of faith and trust, and never doubt but he will secure you: “Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on thee; because he trusteth in thee.” God takes it well when thou comest to him thus: Father, my life, my liberty, or estate, are hunted after, and I cannot secure them; O let me leave them in thy hand: the poor leaveth himself with thee, and doth his God fail him? No; thou art the helper of the fatherless: that is, thou art the helper of the destitute one, that hath none to go to but God. And that is a sweet scripture, “He shall not be afraid of evil tidings; his heart is fixed, trusting in the Lord:” he doth not say, His ear shall be exempted from the report of evil tidings,—he may hear as sad tidings as other men, but his heart shall be exempted from the terror of those tidings; his heart is fixed.

Rule 11. Consult the honour of religion more, and your personal safety less.

Is it for the honour of religion, think you, that Christians should be as timorous as hares, to start at every sound? Will not this tempt the world to think, that, whatever you talk, yet your principles are no better than other men’s? O what mischief may the discoveries of your fears before them do! It was a noble saying of Nehemiah, “Should such a man as I flee? and who, being as I am, would flee?” Were it not better you should die, than that the world should be prejudiced against Christ by your example? For, alas! how apt is the world (who judge more by what they see in your practices, than by what they understand of your principles) to conclude from your timorousness, that how much

soever you commend faith, and talk of assurance, yet you dare trust to these things no more than they when it comes to the trial ! O let not your fears lay such a stumbling-block before the blind world.

Rule 12. He who will secure his heart from fear, must first secure the eternal interest of his soul in the hands of Jesus Christ.

When this is done, then you may say, Now world, do thy worst. You will not be very solicitous about a vile body, when you are once assured it shall be well to all eternity with your precious soul. “ Fear not them,” saith Christ, “ that can kill the body, and after that have no more that they can do.” The assured Christian may smile with contempt upon all his enemies, and say, Is this the worst that they can do ? What say you, Christians—are you assured that your souls are safe, that within a few moments of your dissolution they shall be received by Christ into an everlasting habitation ? Well, if you be sure of that, never trouble yourselves about the instruments and means of your dissolution.

Obj. O, but a violent death is terrible to nature !

Ans. But what matter is it when thy soul is in heaven, whether it were let out at thy mouth, or at thy throat ? whether thy familiar friends, or barbarous enemies stand about thy dead body and close thine eyes ? Alas ! it is not worth the making so much ado about : thy soul shall not be sensible in heaven how thy body is used on earth ; no, it shall be swallowed up in life.

Rule 13. Learn to quench all slavish creature fears, in the reverential fear of God.

This is a cure by diversion : It is a rare piece of

Christian wisdom to turn those passions of the soul which most predominate into spiritual channels, to turn natural anger into spiritual zeal, natural mirth into holy cheerfulness, and natural fear into a holy dread and awe of God. This method of cure Christ prescribes in that forementioned place, Matt. x. Like to which is that in Isa. viii. 12, 13. "Fear not their fear." But how shall we help it? why, "sanctify the Lord of hosts himself, and let him be your fear and your dread." Natural fear may be allayed for the present by natural reason, or the removal of the occasion; but then, it is but like a candle blown out with a puff of breath, which is easily blown in again; but if the fear of God extinguish it, then it is like a candle quenched in water, which cannot be rekindled.

Rule 14. Lastly, Pour out those fears to God in prayer, which the devil and your own unbelief pour in upon you in times of danger.

Prayer is the best out-let to fear. Where is the Christian that cannot set his *probatum est* to this direction? I will give you the greatest example in the world to discourage you in the use of it, even the example of Jesus Christ. When the hour of his danger and death drew nigh, he gets into the garden, separates from the disciples, and then wrestles mightily with God in prayer, even unto an agony; in reference to which the apostle saith, "Who in the days of his flesh, when he had offered up prayers and supplications, with strong cries and tears, to him that was able to save him from death, and was heard in that he feared." He was heard as to strength and support to carry him through it, though not as to deliverance or exemption from it.

Now, O that these things might abide with you, and be reduced to practice in these evil days, that many trembling souls may be established by them.

SEASON V. The fifth season to excite this diligence in keeping the heart, is the time of straits and outward pinching wants. Although at such times we should complain to God, and not of God, (the throne of grace being erected for a time of need,) yet, when the waters of relief run low, and want begins to pinch hard, how prone are the best hearts to distrust the fountain! When the meal in the barrel, and the oil in the cruse are almost spent, our faith and patience are almost spent too. Now, it is difficult to keep down the proud and unbelieving heart in a holy quietude and sweet submission at the foot of God. It is an easy thing to talk of trusting God for daily bread, while we have a full barn or purse; but to say as the prophet, "Though the fig-tree should not blossom, neither fruit be in the vine," &c. "yet will I rejoice in the Lord." Surely this is not easy. The fifth case therefore shall be this:

Case V. How a Christian may keep his heart from distrusting God, or repining against him when outward wants are either felt or feared.

This case deserves to be seriously pondered, and especially to be studied now, since it seems to be the design of Providence, to empty the people of God of their creature-fulness, and acquaint them with those straits which hitherto they have been altogether strangers to.

Now, to secure the heart from the forementioned dangers attending this condition, these following considerations, through the blessing of the Spirit, may prove effectual. And the first is this:

Consid. 1. That if God reduce you to straits and necessities, yet he deals no otherwise therein with you, than he hath done with some of the choicest and holiest men that ever lived.

Your condition is not singular; though you have hitherto been strangers to wants, other saints have daily conversed, and been familiarly acquainted with them. Hear what blessed Paul speaks, not of himself only, but in the name of other saints reduced to like exigencies: "Even to this present hour we both hunger, and thirst, and are naked, and are buffeted, and have no certain dwelling-place." To see such a man as Paul, going up and down the world with a naked back and empty belly, and not a house to put his head in; one that was so far above thee in grace and holiness, one that did more service for God in a day, than perhaps thou hast done him all thy days, and yet thou repine as if hardly dealt with! Have you forgot what necessities and straits even a David hath suffered? How great were his straits and necessities! "Give, I pray thee," saith he to Nabal, "whatsoever cometh to thy hand unto thy servants, and to thy son David." Renowned Musculus was forced to dig in the town-ditch for a maintenance. Famous Ainsworth (as I have been credibly informed) was forced to sell the bed he lay on to buy bread. But what speak I of these? Behold a greater than any of them, even the Son of God, "who is the heir of all things, and by whom the worlds were made;" yet sometimes would have been glad of any thing, having nothing to eat: "And on the morrow, when they were come from Bethany, he was hungry:

and seeing a fig-tree afar off having leaves, he came, if haply he might find any thing thereon."

Well then, hereby God hath set no mark of hatred upon you; neither can you infer the want of love, from the want of bread. When thy repining heart puts the question, Was there ever any sorrow like unto mine? Ask these worthies, and they will tell thee, though they did not complain and fret as thou dost, yet they were driven to as great straits as thou art.

Consid. 2. If God leave you not in this necessitous condition without a promise, you have no reason to repine or despond under it.

That is a sad condition indeed, to which no promise belongs. I remember Mr. Calvin upon those words, Isa. ix. 1. "Nevertheless, the dimness shall not be such as was in her vexation," &c. solves the doubt, in what sense the darkness of the captivity was not so great, as the lesser incursions made by Tiglath Pileser. In the captivity, the city was destroyed, and the temple burnt with fire. There was no comparison in the affliction; but yet the darkness should not be such, and the reason (saith he) is this: there was a certain promise made to this, but none to the other.

It is better to be as low as hell with a promise, than in paradise without one. Even the darkness of hell itself would be comparatively no darkness at all, were there but a promise to enlighten it. Now God hath left many sweet promises for the faith of his poor people to feed on in this condition, such are these: "O fear the Lord, ye his saints: for there is no want to them that fear him. The lions do lack, and

suffer hunger: but they that fear the Lord shall want nothing that is good." "The eye of the Lord is upon the righteous, to keep them alive in famine." "No good thing will be withheld from them that walk uprightly." "He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?" "When the poor and needy seek water, and there is none, and their tongue faileth for thirst, I the Lord will hear them, I the God of Israel will not forsake them." Here you see, first, their extreme wants, water being put even for the necessities of life; second, their certain relief: "I the Lord will hear them;" in which it is supposed, that they cry unto him in their straits, and he hears their cry.

Having therefore these promises, why should not your distrustful hearts conclude like David's, "The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want."

Obj. But these promises imply conditions, if they were absolute they would afford more satisfaction.

Sol. What are those tacit conditions you speak of, but these—1. That either he will supply or sanctify your wants. 2. That you shall have so much as God sees fit for you. And doth this trouble you? Would you have the mercy whether sanctified or not? whether God sees it fit for you or not? Methinks the appetites of saints after earthly things should not be so ravenous, to seize greedily upon any enjoyment, not caring how they have it.

But oh, when wants pinch, and we see not whence supplies should come, then our faith in the promise shakes, and we, like murmuring Israel, cry, "He gave bread, can he give water also?" O unbeliev-

ing hearts! when did his promise fail? who ever trusted them, and was ashamed? May not God upbraid thee with thine unreasonable infidelity, as Jer. ii. 31. "Have I been a wilderness unto you," &c. or as Christ said to the disciples, "Since I was with you, lacked ye any thing?" Yea, may you not upbraid yourselves? may you not say with good old Polycarp, "These many years I have served Christ and found him a good master." Indeed he may deny your wantonness, but not what your real wants call for; he will not regard the cry of lusts, nor yet despise the cry of your faith: though he will not indulge and humour your wanton appetites, yet he will not violate his own faithful promises. These promises are your best security for eternal life; and it is strange if they should not satisfy you for daily bread. Remember ye the words of the Lord, and solace your heart with them amidst all your wants. It is said of Epicurus, that, in the dreadful fits of the cholic, he often refreshed himself by calling to mind his inventions in philosophy; and of Possidonius the philosopher, that, in a great fit of the stone, he solaced himself with discourses of moral virtue; and when the pain twinged him, he would say, "O pain, thou dost nothing; though thou art a little troublesome, I will never confess thee to be evil." If upon such grounds as these they could support themselves under such grinding and racking pains, and even delude their diseases by them—how much rather should the precious promises of God, and the sweet experiences which have gone along step by step with them, make you to forget all your wants, and comfort you in every strait!

Consid. 3. If it be bad now, it might have been worse. Hath God denied thee the comforts of this life? He might have denied thee Christ, peace and pardon also, and then thy case had been woful indeed.

You know God hath done so to millions in the world. How many such wretched objects may our eyes behold every day, that have no comfort in hand, nor yet in hope; are miserable here, and will be so to eternity; that have a bitter cup, and nothing to sweeten it; no, not so much as any hope that it will be better! But it is not so with you; though you be poor in this world, yet you are "rich in faith, and heirs of the kingdom which God hath promised." O learn to set spiritual riches over against temporal poverty! Balance all your present troubles with your spiritual privileges. Indeed, if God had denied your souls the robes of righteousness to clothe them, the hidden manna to feed them, the heavenly mansions to receive them; if your souls were left destitute as well as your bodies, you might well be pensive: but this consideration hath enough to bring the considering soul to rest under any outward strait. It was bravely said by Luther, when want began to pinch him, "Let us be contented with our hard fate, for do we not feast with angels upon Christ the bread of life?" "And blessed be God," saith Paul, "who hath abounded to us in all spiritual blessings."

Consid. 4. This affliction, though great, is not such an affliction but God hath far greater, with which he chastises the dearly beloved of his soul in this world; and should he remove this, and inflict those, you would account your present state a very comfortable state, and bless God to be as now you are.

What think ye, sirs? Should God remove your present troubles, supply all your outward wants, give you the desire of your hearts in creature-comforts; but hide his face from you, shoot his arrows into your souls, and cause the venom of them to drink up your spirits,—should he leave you but a few days to the buffeting of Satan and his blasphemous injection,—should he hold your eyes out a few nights waking with horrors of conscience, tossing to and fro till the dawning of the day,—should he lead you through the chambers of death, show you the visions of darkness, and make his terrors set themselves in array against you,—then tell me if you would not count it a choice mercy to be back again in your former necessitous condition, with peace of conscience; and count bread and water, with God's favour, a happy state? O then, take heed of repining! Say not God deals hardly with you, lest you provoke him to convince you, by your own sense and feeling, that he hath worse rods than these for unsubmissive and forward children.

Consid. 5. If it be bad now, it will be better shortly.

O keep thy heart by that consideration. The meal in the barrel is almost spent; well, be it so, why should that trouble me, if I am almost beyond the need and use of all these things? The traveller hath spent almost all his money, but a shilling or two left: well, saith he, though my money be almost spent, yet my journey is almost finished too: I am near home, and then I shall be fully supplied. If there be no candles in the house, yet it is a comfort to think that it is almost day, and then there will be no

need of candles. I am afraid, Christian, thou misreckonest thyself when thou thinkest thy provision is almost spent, and you have a great way to travel; many years to live, and nothing to live upon. It may be not half so many as thou supposest. In this be confident, if thy provision be spent, either fresh supplies are coming, (though thou seest not from whence,) or thou art nearer thy journey's end than thou reckonest thyself to be. Desponding soul! doth it become a man or woman, travelling upon the road to that heavenly city, and almost arrived there, within a few days' journey of his Father's house, where all his wants shall be supplied, to take on thus about a little meat, drink, or clothes, which he fears he shall want by the way? It was a noble saying of the forty martyrs, famous in the ecclesiastical story; when turned out naked in a frosty night to be starved to death, with these words they comforted one another, "The winter indeed is sharp and cold, but heaven is warm and comfortable; here we shiver for cold, but Abraham's bosom will make amends for all."

Obj. 1. But I may die for want.

Sol. 1. Who ever did so? When were the righteous forsaken? 2. If so, your journey is ended, and you fully supplied.

Obj. 2. But I am not sure of that; were I sure of heaven, it were another matter.

Sol. Are you not sure of that? Then you have other matters to trouble yourselves about than these. Methinks these should be the least of all your cares. I do not find that souls perplexed and troubled about the want of Christ, pardon of sin, &c. are usually very anxious or solicitous about these things. He

that seriously puts such questions as these, What shall I do to be saved? How shall I know my sin is pardoned? doth not usually trouble himself with, “What shall I eat, what shall I drink, or wherewithal shall I be clothed?”

Consid. 6. Doth it become the children of such a Father to distrust his all-sufficiency, or repine at any of his dispensations?

Do you well to question his care and love upon every new exigency? Say, Have you not been ashamed of this formerly? Hath not your Father’s seasonable provisions for you in former straits, put you to the blush, and made you resolve never to question his love and care any more; and yet will you renew your unworthy suspicions of him again? Disingenuous child! reason thus with thyself: If I perish for want of what is good and needful for me, it must either be because my Father knows not my wants, or hath not wherewith to supply them, or else regards not what becomes of me. Which of these shall I charge upon him? Not the first; for “my Father knows what I have need of, my condition is not hid from him.” Not the second; for “the earth is the Lord’s, and the fulness of it.” His name is God all-sufficient. Not the last; for “as a father pitieth his children, so the Lord pities them that fear him.” “The Lord is exceeding pitiful, and of tender mercy.” “He hears the young ravens when they cry,”—and will he not hear me?—“Consider,” saith Christ, “the fowls of the air:” not the fowls at the door, that are every day fed by hand, but the fowls of the air, that have none to provide for them. Doth he feed and clothe his enemies, and will he forget

his children? He heard the very cry of Ishmael in distress. O my unbelieving heart! dost thou yet doubt? Remember Hagar and the child.

Consid. 7. Your poverty is not your sin, but your affliction only. If by sinful means you have not brought it upon yourselves, and if it be but an affliction, it may be borne the easier for that.

It is hard indeed to bear an affliction coming upon us as the fruit and punishment of sin. When men are under trouble on that account, they use to say, O! if it were but a single affliction coming from the hand of God by way of trial, I could bear it; but I have brought it upon myself by sin, it comes as the punishment of sin, the marks of God's displeasure are upon it, it is the guilt within that troubles and galls more than the want without.

But it is not so here, and therefore you have no reason to be cast down under it.

Obj. 1. But though there be no sting of guilt, yet this condition wants not other stings: as, first, the discredit of religion—I cannot comply with mine engagements in the world, and thereby religion is like to suffer.

Sol. It is well you have a heart to discharge every duty; yet if God disable you by providence, it is no discredit to your profession, because you do not that which you cannot do, so long as it is your desire and endeavour to do what you can and ought to do; and in this case God's will is, that lenity and forbearance be exercised towards you, Deut. xxiv. 12, 13.

Obj. 2. But it grieves me to behold the necessities of others whom I was wont to relieve and refresh, but now cannot.

Sol. If you cannot, it ceases to be your duty; and God accepts the drawing out of your soul to the hungry in compassion and desire to help them, though you cannot draw forth a full purse to relieve and supply them.

Obj. 3. But I find such a condition full of temptations, a sore clog in the way to heaven.

Sol. Every condition in the world hath its clogs and attending temptations; and were you in a prosperous condition, you might there meet with more temptations and fewer advantages than now you have; for though I confess poverty hath its temptations as well as prosperity, yet I am confident prosperity hath not those excellent advantages that poverty hath; for here you have an opportunity to discover the sincerity of your love to God, when you can live upon him, find enough in him, and constantly follow him, even when all external inducements and motives fail. And thus I have showed you how to keep your hearts from the temptations and dangers attending a poor and low condition in the world: when want pinches, and the heart begins to sink, then improve and bless God for these helps to keep it.

SEASON VI. The sixth season of expressing this diligence in keeping the heart, is the season of duty. When we draw nigh to God in public, private, or secret duties, then it is time to look to the heart, for the vanity of the heart seldom discovers itself more than at such times. How oft doth the poor soul cry out, O Lord, how fain would I serve thee, but vain thoughts will not let me! I came to open my heart to thee, to delight my soul in communion with thee, but my corruptions have set upon me. Lord,

call off these vain thoughts, and suffer them not to prostitute the soul, which is espoused to thee, before thy face. The sixth case then is this :—

Case VI. How the heart may be kept from distractions by vain thoughts in the time of duty.

There is a twofold distraction, or wandering of the heart, in duty. 1. Voluntary and habitual: “They set not their hearts aright, and their spirit was not steadfast with God.” This is the case with formalists, and it proceeds from the want of a holy bent and inclination of the heart to God; their hearts are under the power of their lusts, and therefore it is no wonder they go after their lusts, even when they are about holy things, Ezek. xxxiii. 31. 2. Involuntary and lamented distractions: “I find then a law, that when I would do good, evil is present with me. O wretched man that I am,” &c. This proceeds not from the want of a holy bent and aim, but from the weakness and imperfection of grace. And in this case the soul may make the like complaint against its own corruptions that Abijah did against Jeroboam: “Yet Jeroboam, the son of Nebat, is risen up against his lord, when Rehoboam was young and tender-hearted, and could not withstand him, and there are gathered unto him vain men, the children of Belial.” Grace hath dominion, but lusts are mutinous and seditious during the infancy thereof. But it is not my business to show you how these distractions come into the heart, but rather how to get and keep them out of the heart. In order whereunto take these ten following helps :—

Help 1. Sequester yourselves from all earthly employments, and set apart some time for solemn

preparation to meet God in duty. You cannot come reeking hot out of the world into God's presence, but you will find a tang of it in your duties. It is with the heart a few minutes since plunged in the world, now at the feet of God, just as with the sea after a storm, which still continues working, muddy, and disquiet, though the wind be laid and the storm over: thy heart must have some time to settle. There are few musicians that can take down a lute or viol, and play presently upon it, without some time to tune it: there are few Christians can presently say, "O God, my heart is fixed, it is fixed." O! when thou goest to God in any duty, take thy heart aside, and say, O my soul, I am now addressing myself to the greatest work that ever a creature was employed about. I am going into the awful presence of God about business of everlasting moment. O my soul! leave trifling now; be composed, watchful, serious: this is no common work, it is God-work, soul-work, eternity-work. I am now going forth bearing seed, which will bring forth fruit to life or death in the world to come: pause a while upon thy sins, wants, troubles: address thyself to duty. David first mused, and then spake with his tongue, Psalm xxxix. 3, 4. So Psalm xlv. 1. "My heart is inditing," &c.

Help 2. Having composed thy heart by previous meditation, presently set a guard upon thy senses. How often are poor Christians in danger of losing the eyes of their mind by those of their body! for this Job "covenanted with his senses;" for this David prayed: "Turn away mine eyes from beholding vanity, and quicken thou me in thy way." This may serve to expound that mystical Arabian proverb,

which advises to “ shut the windows, that the house may be light.” It were excellent if you could say in your onsets upon duty, as a holy man once did when he came off from duty: “ Be shut, O mine eyes be shut : for it is impossible you should ever see such beauty and glory in any creature, as I have now seen in God.” You had need to avoid all occasions of distraction from without, for be sure you will meet enough from within : intention of spirit in the work of God, locks up the eye and ear against vanity. When Marcellus entered the gates of Syracuse, Archimedes was so intent about his mathematical scheme, that he took no notice of the soldiers when they entered his very study with drawn swords : a fervent, cannot be a vagrant heart.

Help 3. Beg of God a mortified fancy. “ A working fancy,” saith one, “ how much soever it be extolled among men, is a great snare to the soul, except it work in fellowship with right reason and a sanctified heart.” The phantasy is a power of the soul placed between the senses and the understanding ; it is that which first stirs itself in the soul, and by its motion other powers are stirred ; it is the common shop where thoughts are first forged and framed, and as this is, so are they if imaginations be not first cast down : it is impossible that every thought of the heart should be brought into obedience to Christ. This fancy is naturally the wildest and most untameable power in the soul. Some Christians (especially such as are of hot and dry constitutions) have much to do with it.

And truly, the more spiritual the heart is, the more it is troubled about the vanity and wildness of it. O ! what a sad thing it is, that thy nobler soul

must lackey up and down after a vain roving fancy; that such a beggar should ride on horseback, and such a prince run after on foot; that it should call off the soul from attendance upon God, when it is most sweetly engaged in communion with him, to prosecute such vanities as it will start at such times before it! Beg earnestly of God that the power of sanctification may once come upon it. Some Christians have attained such a degree of sanctification of their fancies, that they have had much sweetness left upon their hearts by the spiritual workings of it in the night season. When thy fancy is more mortified, thy thoughts will be more orderly and fixed.

Help 4. If thou would keep thy heart from those vain excursions, realize to thyself, by faith, the holy and awful presence of God in duties.

If the presence of a grave man will compose us to seriousness, how much more the presence of a holy God! Thinkest thou thy soul durst be so gay and light, if the sense of a Divine eye were upon it! Remember, the place where thou art is the place of his feet, Isa. lx. 13. Act faith upon the omniscieny of God: "All the churches shall know that I am he that searcheth the heart and trieth the reins, and I will give to every one of you according to your works."—"All things are naked and open to the eyes of Him with whom we have to do." Realize his infinite holiness. Into what a serious composed frame did the sight of God in his holiness put the spirit of the prophet! Isa. vi. 5. Labour to get also upon thy heart due apprehensions of the greatness of God, such as Abraham had, "I that am but dust and

ashes, have taken upon me to speak to God." And lastly, remember the jealousy of God, how tender he is over his worship: "And Moses said unto Aaron, This is that the Lord spake, saying, I will be sanctified in them that come nigh me, and before all the people I will be glorified."

"A man that is praying," saith Bernard, "should behave himself as if he were entering into the court of heaven, where he sees the Lord upon his throne, surrounded with ten thousands of his angels, and saints ministering unto him." When thou comest from a duty, in which thy heart hath been toying and wandering, thou mayest say, "Verily, God was in this place, and I knew it not." Suppose all the impertinencies and vanities which have passed through thine heart in duty were written out, and interlined with thy petitions, couldst thou have the face to present it to God? Should thy tongue but utter all the thoughts of thy heart in prayer, would not men abhor thee? Why, thy thoughts are vocal to God. If thou wert petitioning the king for thy life, would it not provoke him to see thee playing with thy band-strings, or catching every fly that lights upon thy clothes, whilst thou art speaking to him about such serious matters? O think sadly upon that scripture, "God is greatly to be feared in the assemblies of his saints, and to be had in reverence of all that are round about him." Why did God descend in thunderings, and lightnings, and dark clouds, upon Sinai? Why did the mountain smoke under him, the people quake and tremble round about him, yea, Moses himself not exempted, but to teach the people that great truth, "Let us have grace, whereby we may serve him acceptably

with reverence and godly fear, for our God is a consuming fire." Present God thus before thee, and thy vain heart will quickly be reduced to a more serious frame.

Help 5. Maintain a praying frame of heart in the intervals of duty. What is the reason our hearts are so dull, careless, and wandering, when we come to hear or pray, but because there have been such long intermissions in our communion with God, by reason whereof the heart is out of a praying frame? If that spiritual warmth, those holy impressions we carry from God in one duty, were but preserved to kindle another duty, it would be of marvellous advantage to keep the heart intent and serious with God.

To this purpose, those intermediate ejaculations, betwixt stated and solemn duties, are of most sweet and excellent use: by these, one duty is as it were linked to another, and so the soul, as it were, wraps up itself in a chain of duties. That Christian seldom misses his mark in solemn duty that shoots up many of these darts in the intervals of duty: it is an excellent commendation Christ bestows upon the spouse, "Thy lips, O my spouse, drop as the honey-comb." Upon which text, one gives this sweet note—"The honey-comb drops actually but sometimes, but it always hangs full of sweet drops ready to fall." If our ejaculations were more, our lamentations upon this account would be fewer.

Help 6. Endeavour to engage and raise thy affections to God in duty, if thou wouldst have thy distractions cured.

A drooping eye and a melting heart are seldom

troubled as others upon this account. When the soul is intent upon any work, it gathers in its strength, and bends all the thoughts about it; and when it is deeply affected, it will be intent: the affections command the thoughts to go after them; deadness causes distraction, and distraction increases deadness. Could you but look upon duties as the galleries of communion in which you walk with God, where your souls may be filled with those ravishing and matchless delights that are in his presence, your soul would not offer to stir from thence.

It is with the heart in duty as it is with those that dig for golden ore: they try here, and finding none, try there; and so go from place to place, till at last they hit upon the rich vein, and there they sit down. If thy heart could but once hit the rich vein in duty, it would dwell and abide there with delight and constancy: "O how I love thy law, it is my meditation day and night!" The soul could dwell day and night upon its knees, when once its delights, loves, and desires are engaged. What is the reason your hearts are so shuffling, especially in secret duties? Why are you ready to be gone almost as soon as you are come into the presence of God, but because your affections are not engaged?

Help 7. Mourn over the matter to God, and call in assistance from heaven, when vain thoughts assault thy heart in duty.

When the messenger of Satan buffeted Paul by wicked injections, as is supposed, he goes to God, and mourns over it before him. Never slight wandering thoughts in duty as small matters: follow every vain thought with a deep sigh; turn thee to

God with such words as these: Lord, I came hither to speak with thee; and here a busy devil and a vain heart, conspiring together, have set upon me. O my God, what a heart have I! Shall I never wait upon thee without distraction? When shall I enjoy an hour of free communion with thee? Help me, my God, this once: do but display thy glory before mine eyes, and my heart shall quickly be recovered. Thou knowest I came hither to enjoy thee; and shall I go away without thee? See how the heart of thy poor child works towards thee, strives to get near thee, but cannot! My heart is aground: "Come, thou north wind, blow, south wind." O for a fresh gale now from thy Spirit, to set my affections afloat! Couldst thou but thus affectionately bewail thy distractions to God, thou mightest obtain help and deliverance from them. He would say to Satan and thine imperious lusts, as Ahasuerus said of Haman, "What! will he force the queen before my face?" Who are these, that set upon my child in my work and presence?

Help 8. Look upon the success and sweetness of thy duties as very much depending upon the keeping of thy heart close with God in them.

These two things—the success and sweetness of duty—are as dear to a Christian as his two eyes: and both of these must necessarily be lost, if the heart be lost in duty. "Surely God heareth not vanity, neither doth the Almighty regard it." The promise is made to a heart engaged: "Then shall ye seek me, and find me, when ye shall search for me with all your heart." Well then, when thou findest thy heart under the power of deadness and distraction, say to thy soul, O what do I lose by a care-

less heart now ! My praying times are the choicest parts, the golden spots of all my time. Could I but get up this heart with God, I might now obtain such mercies as would be matter for a song to all eternity.

Help 9. Look upon it as a great discovery of the sincerity or hypocrisy of your hearts, according as you find them careful or careless in this matter.

Nothing will startle an upright heart more than this. What ! shall I give way to a customary wandering of heart from God ? Shall the spot of the hypocrite appear upon my soul ? They, indeed, can drudge on in the round of duty, never regarding the frames of their hearts, Ezek. xxxiii. 31, 32. : but shall I do so ? When men come into the presence-chamber, and the king is not there, they bow to the empty chair. O never let me be satisfied with empty duties ! Never let me take my leave of a duty, until mine eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts.

Help 10. Lastly, It will be of special use to keep thine heart with God in duties, to consider what influence all thy duties have on thy eternity.

These are your seed-times ; and what you sow in your duties in this world, you must look to reap the fruit of it in another world : “ If you sow to the flesh, of that you shall reap corruption ; but if to the Spirit, life everlasting.” O my soul, answer seriously : Wouldst thou be willing to reap the fruit of vanity in the world to come ? Darest thou say, when thy thoughts are roving to the ends of the earth in duty, when thou scarce mindest what thou sayest or hearest, Now, Lord, I am sowing to the Spirit ; now I am providing and laying up for eternity ; now I am seeking for glory, honour, and immortality ; now I

am striving to enter in at the strait gate ; now I am taking the kingdom of heaven by a holy violence ? O such a consideration as this should make the multitudes of vain thoughts that press in upon the heart in duty, to fly seven ways before it ! And thus I have shown you how to keep your hearts in the times of duty.

SEASON VII. The seventh season calling for more than common diligence to keep the heart, is when we receive injuries and abuses from men. Such is the depravedness and corruption of man in his collapsed state, that one man is become a wolf, a tiger, to another : they are, as the prophet complains, “ as the fishes of the sea, and as the creeping things, that have no ruler over them.” And as wicked men are cruel and oppressive one to another, so they conspire together to abuse and wrong the people of God : as the same prophet complains, “ The wicked devoureth the man that is more righteous than he.” Now, when we are thus abused and wronged, it is hard to keep the heart from revengeful motions—to make it meekly and quietly to commit the cause to him that judgeth righteously—to exercise no other affection but pity towards them that abuse us. Surely the spirit that is in us lusteth to revenge. But it must not be so : you have choice helps in the gospel to keep down your hearts from such sinful motions against your enemies, and to sweeten your embittered spirits.—The seventh case, therefore, shall be this :

Case VII. How a Christian may keep his heart from revengeful motions, under the greatest injuries and abuses from men.

The gospel, indeed, allows a liberty to vindicate

our innocency and assert our rights; but not to vent our corruptions, and invade God's right. When, therefore, thou findest thy heart begin to be inflamed by revengeful motions, presently apply the following remedies—and the first is this :

Remedy 1. Urge upon thy heart the severe prohibitions of revenge by the law of God. Remember that this is forbidden fruit, how pleasing and luscious soever it be to our vitiated appetites. O, saith nature, revenge is sweet ! O but, saith God, the effects thereof shall be bitter ! How plainly hath God interdicted this flesh-pleasing sin ! “ Say not, I will recompense evil—say not, I will do so to him as he hath done to me.” “ Recompense to no man evil for evil ;” and, “ avenge not yourselves, but rather give place to wrath.” Nay, that is not all : but, “ If thine enemy hunger, feed him ; if he thirst, give him drink.” The word *feed* him, as critics observe, signifies to feed cheerfully and tenderly, as birds do their young ones. The Scripture is a great friend to the peace and tranquillity of human society, which can never be preserved if revenge be not deposed. It was wont to be an argument urged by the Christians to prove their religion to be supernatural and pure, that it forbids revenge, which is so sweet to nature : and verily it is a thousand pities such an argument should be lost. Well, then, awe your hearts with the authority of God in these Scriptures. And when carnal reason saith, ‘ Mine enemies deserve to be hated,’—let conscience reply, ‘ But, doth God deserve to be disobeyed ? Thus and thus hath he done, and so he hath wronged me : but what hath God done, that I should wrong *him* ? If he dare be so bold to break

the *peace*, shall I be so wicked to break the *precept*? If he fears not to wrong me, shall not I fear to wrong God?—Oh, let the fear of God's threatenings repress such sinful motions.

Remedy 2. Set before your eyes the most eminent patterns of meekness and forgiveness, that your soul may fall in love with them.

This is the way to cut off those common pleas of the flesh for revenge. As thus: 'No man would bear such an affront.' Yes! such and such have borne as bad, and worse. 'I shall be reckoned a coward, a fool, if I pass by this.' No matter, as long as you follow the examples of the wisest and most holy of men. Never did any suffer more and greater abuses from men than Christ did, and never did any carry it more peaceably and forgivingly: "He was oppressed and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth—he is brought as a lamb to the slaughter," &c. This pattern the apostle sets before you for your imitation: "For even hereunto were ye called; because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow his steps.—Who, when he was reviled, reviled not again; when he suffered, he threatened not; but committed himself to him that judgeth righteously." To be of a meek forgiving spirit is Christ-like, God-like: "Then shall you be the children of your Father which is in heaven: for he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust." How eminent also did this spirit of Christ rest upon his apostles! Never were there such men upon earth for true excellency of spirit: none were ever abused more, or suffered their abuses

better. "Being reviled," say they, "we bless; being persecuted, we suffer it; being defamed, we entreat." Mr. Calvin, though a man of a quick spirit, yet had attained such a degree of this Christ-like forgiveness, that, when Luther had used some opprobrious language of him, the good man said no more but this: "Although he should call me devil, yet I will acknowledge him to be an eminent servant of Jesus Christ."

I have often heard it reported of holy Mr. Dod, that when one, enraged at his close convincing doctrine, picked a quarrel with him, smote him on the face, and dashed out two of his teeth,—this meek servant of Christ spat out the teeth and blood into his hand, and said, "See here: you have knocked out two of my teeth, and that without any just provocation; but on condition I might do your soul good, I would give you leave to dash out all the rest." Here is excellency of a Christian spirit, above all attainments of moral heathens: though they were excellent at many other things, yet they could never attain this forgiving spirit. "It is the first office of justice," said Tully, "to hurt nobody, unless first provoked by an injury." Whereupon Lactantius—"O what a dainty sentence spoiled the orator by adding these two last words!" Strive then for this excellency of spirit, which is the proper excellency of Christians: do some singular thing that others cannot do, and then you will have a testimony in their consciences. When Moses outdid the magicians, they were forced to confess the finger of God in that business.

Remedy 3. Consider well the quality of the person

that hath wronged thee. Either he is a good man or a wicked man that hath done thee the injury. If he be a good man, there is light and tenderness in his conscience, and that will bring him at last to a sense of the evil he hath done. However, Christ hath forgiven him greater injuries than these; and why shouldst not thou? Will Christ upbraid him with any of those wrongs done to him, but frankly forgive him all; and wilt thou take him by the throat for some petty abuse that he hath done to thee?

Or is he a wicked man? If so, truly you have more need to exercise pity than revenge towards him, and that upon a double account. For, 1. He is beside himself: so indeed is every unconverted sinner, Luke xv. 17. Should you go into bedlam, and there hear one rail at you, another mock you, and a third threaten you, would you say, I will be revenged upon them? No, you would rather go away pitying them: Alas, poor creatures! they are out of their wits, and know not what they do. Besides, 2. There is a day coming, if they repent not, when they will have more misery than you can find in your hearts to wish them. You need not study to revenge; God's vengeance sleepeth not, and will shortly take place upon them: and is not that enough? Have they not an eternity of misery coming? If they repent not, this must be the portion of their cup; and if ever they do repent, they will be ready to make you reparation.

Remedy 4. Keep down thy heart by this consideration, that by revenge thou canst but satisfy a lust, but by forgiveness thou shalt conquer a lust.

Suppose, by revenge, thou shouldst destroy one

enemy, I will show thee how, by forgiving, thou shalt conquer three: thine own lust, the devil's temptation, and thine enemy's heart. And is not this a more glorious conquest? If by revenge thou overcome thine enemy, yet, as Bernard saith, "Unhappy victory! when, by overcoming another man, thou art overcome by thine own corruption." But this way you may obtain a glorious conquest indeed. What an honourable victory did David this way obtain over Saul! "And it came to pass, when David had made an end of speaking these words, that Saul lifted up his voice and wept. And he said to David, Thou art more righteous than I."

It must be a very disingenuous nature indeed upon which meekness and forgiveness will not work; a stony heart, which this fire will not melt. To this sense is that, Prov. xxv. 21. "If thine enemy hunger, feed him; if he thirst, give him drink: for in so doing thou shalt heap coals of fire upon his head." Some will have it a sin-punishing fire, but others a heart-melting fire: to be sure, it will either melt his heart, or aggravate his misery. Augustine thinks that Stephen's prayer for his enemies was the great means of Paul's conversion.

Remedy 5. Seriously propound this question to thy own heart: Have I got any good by the wrongs and injuries received, or have I not? If they have done you no good, turn the revenge upon yourselves:—O that I should have such a bad heart, that can get no good out of such troubles! O that my spirit should be so unlike to Christ's! The patience and meekness of other Christians have turned all the injuries thrown at them into precious stones: the spirits of

others have been raised in blessing God, when they have been loaded with reproaches from the world; they have bound them as an ornament to their necks. Luther said, "I could even be proud upon it, that I have a bad name among wicked men." To the same purpose Jerome said sweetly, "I thank my God that I am worthy to be hated of the world." Thus their hearts were provoked by injuries to magnify God, and bless him for them: if it work contrary with me, I have cause enough to be filled with self-displacency.

If you have got any good by them, if the reproaches and wrongs you have received, have made you search your hearts the more, watch your ways more narrowly; if their wronging you, have made you see how you have wronged God, then let me say for them as Paul did himself, "Pray forgive them this wrong."

What! can you not find a heart to forgive one that hath been instrumental of so much good to you! That is strange! What though they meant it for evil, yet if God hath turned it to good, you have no more reason to rage against the instrument, than he had who received a wound from his enemy, which only brake and let out that imposthume, which otherwise had been his death.

Remedy 6. It is of excellent use to keep the heart from revenge, to look up and eye the first cause by which all our troubles are ordered.

This will calm and meeken our spirits quickly. Never did a wicked tongue try the patience of a saint more than David's was tried by that railing Shimei; yet the spirit of this good man was not at all poisoned with revenge, though he goes along cursing and cast-

ing stones at him all the way: yea, though Abishai offered David, if he pleased, the head of that enemy; yet the king said, “What have I to do with you, ye sons of Zeruiah? So let him curse, because the Lord hath said unto him, Curse David. Who then shall say, wherefore hast thou done so?” It may be God uses him as his rod to lash me, because I by my sin made his enemies blaspheme him; and shall I be angry with the rod? How irrational were that? This also was it that quieted Job: he doth not rail, and vow revenge upon the Chaldeans and Sabeans, but eyes God as the orderer of those troubles, and is quiet. “The Lord hath taken away, blessed be his name.”

Obj. But you will say, “To turn aside the right of a man, to subvert a man in his cause, the Lord approveth not.”

Ans. True, but though it fall not under his approving, yet it doth under his permitting will; and there is a great argument for quiet submission in that; nay, he hath not only the permitting, but the ordering of all these troubles. Did we see more of a holy God, we would show less of a corrupt nature in such trials.

Remedy 7. Consider how you daily wrong God, and you will not be so easily inflamed with revenge against others that have wronged you.

You are daily grieving and wronging God, and yet he bears, forgives, and will not take vengeance upon you; and will you be so quick in revenging yourselves upon others. O what a sharp and terrible rebuke is that, “O thou wicked and slothful servant, I forgave thee all that debt because thou desiredst me, shouldst not thou also have had compas-

sion on thy fellow servant, even as I had pity on thee?" None should be so filled with bowels of pity, forbearance, and mercy, to such as wrong them, as those should be that have experienced the riches of mercy themselves. Methinks the mercy of God to us, should melt our very bowels into mercy themselves. It is impossible we can be cruel to others, except we forget how kind Christ hath been to us. Those that have found mercy, should show mercy. If kindness cannot work, methinks fear should: "If ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive you your trespasses."

Remedy 8. Lastly, Let the consideration of the day of the Lord, which draweth nigh, withhold your hearts from anticipating it by acts of revenge.

Why are you so quick? Is not the Lord at hand to avenge all his abused servants? "Be patient therefore, my brethren, unto the coming of the Lord. Behold, the husbandman waiteth, &c.—Be ye also patient, for the coming of the Lord draweth nigh. Grudge not one against another, brethren, lest ye be condemned. Behold, the Judge standeth at the door." This text affords three arguments against revenge. 1. The Lord's near approach. 2. The example of the husbandman's patience. 3. The danger we draw upon ourselves by anticipating God's judgment: "Vengeance is mine," saith the Lord. He will distribute justice more equally and impartially than you can. They that believe they have a God to right them, will not so much wrong themselves as to avenge their own wrongs.

Obj. 1. But flesh and blood are not able to bear such abuses.

Sol. If you resolve to consult flesh and blood in such cases, and do no more but what that will enable you to do, never pretend to religion: Christians must do singular and supernatural things.

Obj. 2. But, if I put up with such abuses, I shall be reckoned a fool, and every one will trample upon me.

Sol. 1. You may be reckoned so among fools, but God and good men will account it your wisdom, and the excellency of your spirits. 2. It must be a base spirit, indeed, that will trample upon a meek and forgiving Christian: and thus learn to keep your hearts from revenge under all your provocations.

SEASON VIII. The next season in which we are in danger of losing our hearts, is, when we meet with great crosses and provocations. Then sinful passion is apt to transport the heart. It is the fault of many good men to be of hasty and quick spirits, when provoked; though they dare not concoct anger into malice, for that would be a note of wickedness; yet are they very incident to sudden anger, which is a sign of weakness. Beza, in the life of Calvin, observes, that he was of a keen and hasty spirit; and he that writes the life of the great Cameron, saith, that his anger was soon stirred towards his nearest and familiar friends; but then, he would easily depose it, and acknowledge his weakness. Alas, when provocations and trials of our patience come, we know not what spirit we are of. The eighth case, therefore, is this:

Case VIII. How the heart may be kept meek and patient under great crosses and provocations.

There are three sorts of anger, natural, holy, and sinful anger. 1. Natural, which is nothing else but

the motion of the irascible appetite towards an offensive object; and this, in itself, is no sin: they are propassions rather than passions, the infelicities rather than the sins of nature, as Jerome calls them. Reason, saith Plutarch, is the driver, the soul is the chariot, and the two horses that draw it on in all its motions, are the concupiscible and irascible appetites. Whilst these are rightly managed by reason, they are not only lawful but useful to the soul. God would not have us to be stupid and insensate, though he would have us to be meek and patient. In Eph. iv. 26. he allows the natural motion, but forbids the sinful exorbitancy. 2. Holy anger, which is a pure flame, kindled by a heavenly spark of love to God, and in scripture is called “zeal;” which is, as one saith, the dagger which love draws in God’s quarrel. Such was Lot’s against the Sodomites, and that of Moses against the idolatrous Israelites. When Servetus condemned Zuinglius for his harshness, his answer was, in other cases I will be mild, but in the cause of Christ, not so. That which the world calls moderation and mildness here, is, in God’s account, stupidity and cowardliness; neither of these are that which I am now persuading you to keep your hearts against. But, 3. There is a sinful passion, that is the thing which endangers you. Now, anger becomes sinful when it is either causeless, Mat. v. 22. or excessive; and that, either in measure or time, exceeding the value of the impulsive cause, be it more transient or abiding; yet it is a sin, and is matter of humiliation before God. Now the means to keep the heart from it under provocations, are these:—

Means 1. Get low and humble thoughts of your-

selves, and then you will have meek spirits, and peaceable deportments towards others.

The humble is ever the patient man—pride is the root of passion—a lofty will be a surly spirit—bladders blown up with wind will not lie close together, but prick them, and you may pack a thousand in a small room—“only by pride cometh contention.” When we overrate ourselves, then we think we are unworthily treated by others, and that provokes: and here (by the way) take notice of one great benefit of acquaintance with your own hearts, even the meekness and calming of your spirits. Christian, methinks thou wouldst know thyself; that it is impossible any should lay thee lower, or have baser thoughts of thee, than thou hast of thyself. Some render the original of that text, Hab. ii. 5. “The proud man is as he that transgresseth by wine:” and drunkards, you know, are quarrelsome. O get more humility, and that will bring you more peace!

Means 2. Be often sweetening your spirits in communion with God, and they will not easily be embittered with wrath towards men.

A quiet conscience never produced an unquiet conversation. The peace of God doth rule in the heart, as an umpire in appeasing strifes; for so much that word, Col. iii. 15. imports. Wrath and strife are greatly opposite to the frame and temper of a spiritual heart, because it is inconsistent with the delight and contentment of that dove-like spirit, which loves a sedate and quiet breast. O! saith a soul that feeds upon the sweet communion of the Spirit, shall the sparkles of provocations now catch in my passions, and raise such a smoke in my soul as will offend and

drive away the Comforter from me ? This is so effectual a remedy against passion, that I durst almost venture, in a Christian of a hasty nature, to make long-sufferings a sign of communion with God. Seest thou such a Christian quiet and calm under provocations, it is very like his soul feeds upon such sweetness in God as he is loath to leave : and, on the other side, seest thou a Christian turbulent and clamorous, doubtless, all is not well within ; his spirit is like a bone out of joint, which cannot move without pain and trouble.

Means 3. Get due apprehensions of the evil nature and effects of sinful anger :—Anger is a short madness, saith one : Saith another, Anger is the fever of the soul : It is the interregnum and eclipse of reason, saith a third.

The effects of it are also very sad. 1. It grieves the Spirit of God : banishes him from that breast in which it rages and tumultuates. God is the God of peace ;—the presence and comforts of God are only enjoyed in the calm. It is a golden note one gives upon the forecited text—God doth not usually bless with peace of conscience, such as make no conscience of peace. 2. It gives advantage to the devil. Satan is an angry and discontented spirit, and finds no rest but in restless hearts ; he lives, like the Salamander, in fires of contention,—he bestirs himself when the spirits are in a commotion—sometimes he fills the heart with revengeful thoughts, sometimes he fills the lips, and inflames the tongue with indecent language : even a meek Moses sometimes spoke unadvisedly with his lips. 3. It untunes the spirit for duty : upon this account the apostle dissuades husbands and wives from jarring carriages and conten-

tions, that their prayers be not hindered. All acts of worship must be suitable to the object of worship; but God is the God of peace—the God of love.

4. To mention no more, it disparages the Christian religion. How would Plato and Pythagoras shame us if they were now living. Christ was a lamb for meekness, and doth it become his followers to be like lions? O keep your hearts, or you will at once lose, not only your own peace, but the credit of religion!

Means 4. Consider how sweet a thing it is to a Christian, to conquer his corruptions, and carry away the spoils of them.

“He that is slow to anger is better than the mighty; and he that ruleth his spirit than he that taketh a city.” Is there any contentment in venting a passion; how much more in mortifying it? When thou comest in a calm mood, or upon a death-bed, to review thy life, how comfortable then will it be to reflect upon the conquests thou hast got, by the fear of God, over the evil propensions of thine own heart! It was a memorable saying of Valentinian the emperor, when he came to die: ‘Amongst all my conquests (said he) there is but one that now comforts me;’ and being asked what that was, he answered, ‘I have overcome my worst enemy, mine own naughty heart.’

Means 5. Shame yourselves by setting before you those eminent patterns that have been most excellent for meekness.

Above all, compare your spirits with the spirit of Christ: “Learn of me,” saith he, “for I am meek lowly.” Christ was meek and lowly, but I am proud and passionate. It was the high commendation of

Moses: "Now the man Moses was meek, above all the men of the earth:" and this was the man that knew God face to face. It is said of Calvin and Ursin, that they both were of choleric natures, but yet had so learned the meekness of Christ, as not to utter one word, under the greatest provocation, unbecoming religion. When I read the pretty stories of the very heathens, that never had the advantages we have, how the Pythagoreans, whatever feuds had been among them in the day, would hush all by sending to each other this message, "The sun is almost set;" and that of Plato to his scholar, "I would beat thee if I were not angry."

When I read what lenity and tenderness Lycurgus showed to an insolent fellow, that had struck out one of his eyes, I am ashamed to see how much Christians are outdone by heathens; who, by mere moral arguments and precepts, had thus meekened their spirits, and conquered their passions. The dim light of nature could teach Seneca to say, 'That anger will hurt a man more than the offence; for there is a certain bound in the offence, but I know not how far mine anger will carry me.' It is a shame that these men, who came so far behind us in means and advantages, should so far outstrip us in meekness and patience.

Means 6. Lastly, Avoid all irritating occasions.

He that will not bear the clapper, must not pull the rope: "Grievous words stir up anger," saith Solomon. Do not only pray and resolve against it, but get as far as you can out of the way of it. It is true spiritual valour, to run as fast and as far as we can out of sin's way. If you can but avoid anger in

its first rise, there is no great fear of it afterwards : for it is not with this sin as it is with other sins ; other sins grow to their full strength by degrees, their first motions are the weakest ; but this sin is born in its full strength : it is strongest at first, withstand it then, and it falls before you. Thus learn to keep your heart when provocations arise.

SEASON IX. The ninth season of exerting our greatest diligence, is the critical hour of temptation ; wherein Satan lays close siege to the fort-royal of a Christian's heart, and often surprises it for want of watchfulness. To keep thy heart now, is no less a mercy than a duty. Few Christians are so well skilled in detecting the fallacies, and retorting the arguments, by which Satan uses to draw them to sin, as to come off safe in those encounters. " Watch and pray," saith our Lord, " lest ye enter into temptation." Even an eminent David, and a wise Solomon, have smarted for their carelessness at such a time as this. The ninth case, therefore, shall be this :

Case IX. How a Christian, when strongly solicited by the devil to sin, may keep his heart from yielding to the temptation.

Now, there are six special arguments by which Satan subtly insinuates and winds in the temptation ; in all which I shall offer thee some help for the keeping of thy heart. And the first is this :

Arg. 1. The first argument is drawn from the pleasure of sin. O, saith Satan, here is pleasure to be enjoyed : the temptation comes with a smiling countenance and charming voice. What, art thou so phlegmatic and dull a soul, as not to feel the powerful charms of pleasure ? who can withhold himself from such delights ?

Now, thine heart may be kept from the danger of this temptation, by retorting this argument of pleasure upon the tempter: which is done two ways:

1. Thou tellest me, Satan, that sin is pleasant. Be it so; but are the gripes of conscience, and the flames of hell so too? Is it pleasant to feel the wounds and throbs of conscience? If so, why did David cry out of broken bones? I hear what thou sayest of the pleasure of sin; and I have read what David hath said of the terrible effects of sin, in his Psalm “to bring to remembrance:”—“Thine arrows stick fast in me, and thy hand presseth me sore. There is no soundness in my flesh because of thine anger; neither is there any rest in my bones because of my sin. For mine iniquities are gone over mine head; as a heavy burden they are too heavy for me. My wounds stink, and are corrupt, because of my foolishness. I am troubled; I am bowed down greatly; I go mourning all the day long. For my loins are filled with a loathsome disease; and there is no soundness in my flesh. I am feeble and sore broken: I have roared by reason of the disquietness of my heart.”—Here I see the true face of sin. If I yield to thy temptation, I must either feel these pangs of conscience, or the flames of hell.

2. What talkest thou of the pleasure of sin, when, by experience, I know there is more true pleasure in the mortification, than can be in the commission of sin. O how sweet is it to please God, to obey conscience, to preserve inward peace! to be able to say, In this trial I have discovered the sincerity of my heart; now I know I fear the Lord; now I see that I truly hate sin! Hath sin any such delight as this? This will choke that temptation.

Arg. 2. The second argument is drawn from the secrecy of sin. O, saith Satan, this sin will never disgrace thee abroad; none shall know it.

This argument may be retorted, and the heart secured thus: Thou sayest, None shall know it; but, Satan, canst thou find a place void of the divine presence for me to sin in? Thus Job secured his heart from this temptation: "Doth he not see my ways, and count all my steps?" therefore he makes a covenant with his eyes. After the same manner Solomon teaches us to retort this temptation: "And why, my son, wilt thou be ravished with a strange woman, and embrace the bosom of a stranger? For the ways of man are before the eyes of the Lord, and he pondereth all his goings." What if I hide it from the eyes of all the world for the present, I cannot hide it from God: and the time is at hand, when all the world shall know it too; for the word assures me, that "what is now done in secret shall be proclaimed as upon the housetop." Besides, is not my conscience as a thousand witnesses? Do I owe no reverence to myself? Could the heathen man say, "when thou art tempted to commit sin, fear thyself without any other witness?" and shall not I be afraid to sin before mine own conscience, which always hath a reproof in its mouth, or a pen in its hand, to record my most secret actions?

Arg. 3. The third argument by which Satan tempteth to sin, is taken from the gain and profit arising out of it: Why so nice and scrupulous? It is but to stretch conscience a little, and thou mayest make thyself: now is thy opportunity!

The heart may be kept from falling into this dan-

gerous snare, by retorting the temptation thus: But what profit will it be if a man “should gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?” Or, “what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?” O my soul! my precious soul! shall I hazard thee for all the good that is in this world? There is an immortal spirit, dwelling in this fleshly tabernacle, of more value than all earthly things, which must live to all eternity, when this world shall lie in white ashes: a soul for which Jesus Christ shed his precious and invaluable blood. I was sent into this world to provide for this soul. Indeed, God hath also committed to me the care of my body, but, as one happily expresses it,* with this difference: a master commits two things to a servant—the child, and the child’s clothes. Will the master thank the servant, if he plead, I have kept the clothes, but I have neglected the life of the child?

Arg. 4. The fourth argument is drawn from the smallness of the sin. It is but a little one, a small matter, a trifle; who would stand upon such niceties?

This argument may be retorted three ways:

1. But is the Majesty of Heaven a little one too? If I commit this sin, I must offend and wrong a great God, Isa. xl. 15, 16, 17, 22.

2. Is there any little hell to torment little sinners in? Are not the least sinners there filled with the fulness of wrath? O there is great wrath treasured up for such as the world counts little sinners!

3. The less the sin, the less the inducement to commit it. What, shall I break with God for a

* See Gospel Glass, p. 3.

trifle?—destroy my peace, wound my conscience, grieve the Spirit, and all this for nothing? O what madness is this !

Arg. 5. A fifth argument is drawn from the grace of God, and hopes of pardon. Come, God will pass by this as an infirmity; he will not be extreme to mark it. But stay my heart.

1. Where do I find a promise of mercy to presumptuous sinners? Indeed, for involuntary surprisals, unavoidable and lamentable infirmities, there is a pardon of course; but where is the promise to a daring sinner, that sins upon presumption of pardon? Pause a while, my soul, upon that scripture, Num. xv. 27, 30. “And if a soul sin through ignorance, then he shall bring a she-goat of the first year for a sin-offering,” &c.—“But the soul that doth ought presumptuously, the same reproacheth the Lord; and that soul shall be cut off from among his people.”

2. If God be a God of so much mercy, how can I abuse so good a God? Shall I take so glorious an attribute as the mercy of God is, and abuse it unto sin? Shall I wrong him because he is good? or should not rather the goodness of God lead me to repentance? “There is mercy with thee, that thou mayest be feared.”

Arg. 6. Lastly, sometimes Satan encourages to sin, from the examples of good and holy men: thus and thus they have sinned, and been restored; therefore this may consist with grace, and thou be saved nevertheless. The danger of this temptation is avoided, and the heart secured, by retorting the argument these three ways:

1. Though good men may commit the same sin

materially which I am tempted to do, yet, did ever any good man venture to sin upon such a ground and encouragement as this?

2. Did God record these examples for my imitation or for my warning? Are they not set up as sea-marks, that I might avoid the rocks upon which they split? “Now these were our examples, to the intent we should not lust after evil things, as they also lusted.”

3. Am I willing to feel what they felt for sin? O! I dare not follow them in the ways of sin, lest God should plunge me into the deeps of horror into which he cast them.

Thus, learn to keep your hearts in the hour of temptation to sin.

SEASON X. The tenth special season, to keep the heart with all diligence, is the time of spiritual darkness and doubting, when it is with the soul, as it was with Paul in his dangerous voyage—neither sun, nor moon, nor star appear for many days; when, by reason of the hidings of God’s face, the prevalency of corruption, and the inevidence of grace, the soul is even ready to give up all its hopes and comforts for lost; to draw sad and desperate conclusions upon itself; to call its former comforts, vain delusions; its grace, hypocrisy. When the serene and clear heavens are overcast with dark clouds; yea, filled with thunders, and horrible tempests; when the poor pensive soul sits down and weeps for this sad lamentation, “My hope is perished from the Lord.” Now, to keep the heart from sinking in such a day as this, to enable it to maintain its own sincerity, is a matter of great difficulty. The tenth case then will be this:

Case X. How the people of God, in dark and doubting seasons, may keep their hearts from entertaining such sad conclusions about their states, as destroy their peace, and unfit them for their duty.

There are two general heads to which the grounds of doubting our sincerity may be reduced, (1.) God's carriage towards the soul, either in the time of some extraordinary affliction, or of some long and sad desertion. Or, (2.) The soul's carriage towards God: and here it usually argues against the truth of its own graces, either, (1.) From its relapses into the same sins, from which it hath formerly risen, with shame and sorrow. Or, (2.) From the sensible declining of its affections from God. Or, (3.) From the excess of the affections towards creature-comforts and enjoyments. Or, (4.) From its enlargements in public, and often straitenings in private duties. Or, (5.) From some horrid injections of Satan, with which the soul is greatly perplexed. Or, lastly, from God's silence, and seeming denial of its long depending suits and prayers.

These are the common grounds of those sad conclusions. Now, in order to the establishment and support of the heart in this condition, it will be necessary,

1. That you be acquainted with some general truths, which have a tendency to the settlement of a trembling and doubting soul.

2. That you be rightly instructed about the fore-mentioned particulars, which are the grounds of your doubting.

The general truths requisite for poor doubting souls to be acquainted with, are these :

1. That every working and appearance of hypocrisy, doth not presently prove the person in whom it is, to be a hypocrite. You must carefully distinguish between the presence and predominancy of hypocrisy. There are remains of deceitfulness in the best hearts: David and Peter had sad experience of it; yet the standing frame, and general bent of the heart being upright, it did not denominate them hypocrites.

2. That we ought as well to hear what can be said for us, as against us. It is the sin of upright hearts sometimes to use an over-rigid, and merciless severity against themselves: they do not indifferently consider the case of their own souls. It is, in this case, as Solomon speaks in another: "There is that maketh himself rich, and yet hath nothing; and there is that maketh himself poor, and yet hath great riches." It is the damning sin of the self-flattering hypocrite, to make his condition better than it is: and it is the sin and folly of some upright ones, to make their condition worse than indeed it is. Why should you be such enemies to your own peace? To read over the evidences of God's love to your souls, as a man doth a book which he intends to confute? Why do you study to find evasions, to turn off those comforts which are due to you? It is said of Joseph, he was minded to put away his espoused Mary; not knowing that that holy thing which was conceived in her, was by the Holy Ghost;—and this may be your case. And a third truth is this,

3. That many a saint hath charged and condemned himself, for that which God will never charge him with, nor condemn him for: "Why hast

thou hardened our hearts from thy fear," saith the church, Isa. lxiii. 17. and yet the verse before manifests, that their hearts were not so hardened. Godly Bradford wrote himself a hypocrite, a painted sepulchre ; yet, doubtless, God acquitted him of that charge.

4. Every thing which is a ground of grief to the people of God, is not a sufficient ground of questioning their sincerity. There are many more things to trouble you, than there are to stumble you. If upon every slip and failing through infirmity, you should question all that ever was wrought upon you, your life must be made up of doubtings and fears, you can never attain a settled peace, nor live that life of praise and thankfulness the gospel calls for.

5. The soul is not at all times fit to pass judgment upon its own condition. To be sure, in the dark day of desertion, when the soul is benighted ; and in the stormy day of temptation, when the soul is in a hurry, it is utterly unfit to judge its state : " Examine your hearts upon your beds, and be still." This is rather a season for watching and resisting, than for judging and determining.

6. That every breach of peace with God, is not a breach of covenant with God. The wife who hath many weaknesses and failings, often grieves and displeases her husband ; yet in the main is faithful, and truly loves him. These failings may cause him to alter his carriage, but not to withdraw his love, or deny his relation : " Return, O backsliding Israel, for I am married unto you."

7. Lastly, whatever our sin or trouble be, it should rather drive us to God, than from God :

“Pardon my sin, for it is great.” Suppose it be true, that thou hast so and so sinned, that thou art thus long and sadly deserted; yet it is a false inference, that therefore thou shouldst be discouraged, as if there were no help for thee in thy God. When you have well digested these seven establishing truths, if still the doubt remain, then consider what may be replied to the particular grounds of these doubts. As,

I. You doubt, and are ready to conclude, the Lord hath no regard or love for your souls, because of some extraordinary affliction which is come upon you. But I would not have thy soul so to conclude, till thou be able satisfactorily to answer these three queries:

Query 1. If great troubles and afflictions be marks of God’s hatred, why should not impunity and constant prosperity be tokens of his love? For, of contrary things, there is a contrary reason and consequence. But is this so indeed? Or saith not the scripture quite otherwise? Prov. i. 32. “The prosperity of fools destroy them.” So also Psal. xxxvii. 5.

Query 2. Dare I draw the same conclusion upon all others that have been as much, yea, more afflicted than myself? If this argument conclude against thee, then so it doth against every one in thy condition: yea, the greater the affliction of any child of God hath been, the more strongly the argument still concludes; and then woe to David, Job, Heman, Paul, and all that have been afflicted as they were.

Query 3. Had God exempted you only from those troubles which all his other people feel, would not that have been a greater ground of doubting to

you than this? especially since the scripture saith, "If ye be without chastenings, whereof all are partakers, then are ye bastards, and not sons."

O how is our Father put to it by froward children! If he afflicts, then one cries, He loves me not: If he exempts from affliction, others question his love upon that ground. Surely you have other work to do under the rod than this.

II. Or do you rashly infer, the Lord hath no love for you, because he hides his face from you; that your condition is miserable, because dark and uncomfortable. Before you draw such rash conclusions, see what answer you can give to these four following queries:

Query 1. If any action of God towards his people will bear a favourable, as well as a harsh and severe construction, why should not his people interpret it in the best sense? And is not this such! May he not have a design of love as well as of hatred, in this dispensation? May he not depart for a season, and not for ever? Yea, that he might not depart for ever! You are not the first that have mistaken God's ends in desertion: "Sion said, the Lord hath forsaken me, my God hath forgotten me." Was it so indeed? Nothing less? "Can a mother forget," &c.

Query 2. Do you find the marks of an absolute, total, and final desertion upon your own spirits, that you are so apt to conclude yours to be such? Do you find your heart inclined to forsake God? Have you lost your conscientious tenderness in point of sin? If so, sad characters appear upon you indeed. But if, in this dark hour, you are as tender of sin as ever; as much resolved to cleave to God as ever: I

cannot, I will not forsake God, let him do what he will with me : O no, I cannot. If your hearts work thus, it can be but a partial, limited, and temporary desertion. By this he still keeps his interest in your hearts : a sure sign he will return and visit you again.

Query 3. Is sense and feeling a competent judge of God's actions and designs? Or may a man safely rely upon its testimony, after so many discoveries of the infallibility of it? Is this a sound argument? If God had any love for my soul—if it were not quite gone, I should feel it now as well as in former times ; but I cannot feel it, therefore it is quite gone. Do you know the sun still keeps on his course in the heavens, even in dull and close weather, when you cannot see it? And may it not be so with the love of God? Read Isa. l. 10. May not I as well conclude in winter, when the flowers have hid their beautiful heads under ground, they are quite dead and gone, because I cannot find them in December where I saw them in May?

Query 4. Think you, the Lord cares not to break his childrens' hearts, and his own promise too? Hath he no more regard to either? If he return no more, these must be the consequents, Isa. lvii. 16, 17. Heb. xiii. 5.

Well then, from God's carriage towards you, either in affliction or desertion, no such discouraging, heart-sinking conclusion can be inferred. Next let us see whether they may not be inferred from our carriage towards God, and here the principal grounds of doubting are such as these:—

I. I have fallen again into the same sin from which I have formerly risen with repentance and re-

solution ; therefore my sinning is customary sinning, a spot that is not the spot of God's children. Hence the upright soul trembles ; upon this it is ready to affirm, that all its former humiliations for, and oppositions to sin, were but acts of hypocrisy. But stay poor trembling heart.

Query 1. If this be so, how comes it to pass that Christ put such a favourable construction upon the disciples sleeping the third time, when he had as often reproved them for it ? And how is it that we find in Scripture so many promises made, not only to the first sins, but also to the backslidings of God's people, Jer. iii. 22. Hos. xiv. 4.

Query 2. Is not your repentance and care renewed as often as your guilt is renewed ? Yea, the oftener you sin, the more you are troubled. It is not so in customary sinning ; the rise whereof Bernard excellently discovers :—" 1. (saith he,) When a man accustomed to good sinneth grievously, it seems insupportable ; yea, he seems to descend alive into hell. 2. In process of time it seems not insupportable, but heavy ; and betwixt insupportable and heavy there is no small descent. 3. Next it becomes light, his conscience smites but faintly, and he feels not the stripes of it. 4. Then there is not only a total insensibleness of it, but that which was bitter and displeasing is now become sweet and pleasing in some degree. 5. Then it is turned into custom, and not only pleases, but daily pleases. Lastly, custom is turned into nature, he cannot be pulled away from it, but defends and pleads for it. This is customary sinning, this is the way of the wicked ; but the quite contrary is your condition."

Query 3. Are you sure, from scripture grounds, that good men may not relapse again and again into the same sin? It is true, as for gross sins, they do not use to relapse into them. David committed adultery no more—Paul persecuted the church no more—Peter denied Christ no more: but I speak of ordinary infirmities. Job's friends were good men, yet, saith he, "These ten times have ye reproached me." So then, no such conclusions follow from this first ground of doubting.

II. The second ground is, the declining and withering of our affections to spiritual things. O! saith the upright soul, if ever I had been planted a right seed, I should have been as a green olive-tree in the house of my God; but my branches wither, therefore my root is naught. But stay—

Query 1. May you not be mistaken about the decay of grace, and fading of your affections? What if they are not so quick and ravishing as at first? May not that be recompensed in the spirituality and solidity of them now? "I pray God your love may abound more and more in all judgment:" It may be more solid though not so fervent. Or do you not mistake, by looking forward to what you would be, rather than backward to what you once were? It is a good note of Ames, "We discern the growth of grace as the growth of plants, which we perceive rather to have grown than to grow."

Query 2. But grant it be so indeed as you affirm, must it needs follow that the root of the matter is not in you? David's last ways are distinguished from his first, 2 Chron. xvii. 3. And yet both first and last, a holy man. The church of Ephesus is

charged by Christ for leaving her first love, and yet a golden candlestick : many precious saints in that church : Rev. ii. 2—4.

III. A third ground of these sad conclusions, is the excess of our affections to some creature-enjoyments. I fear I love the creature more than God; and if so, my love is but hypocritical. I sometimes feel stronger, and more sensible motions of my heart to some earthly comforts, than I do to heavenly objects; therefore, my soul is not upright in me. But stay, O soul!

Query 1. May not a man love God more solidly and strongly than the creature, and yet his affections to the creature be sometimes moved more violently and sensibly than towards God? As rooted malice argues a stronger hatred than a sudden though more violent passion; so we must measure our love, not by a violent motion of it, now and then, but by the depth of the root, and constancy of its actings. Because David was so passionately moved for Absalom, Joab concludes, that if he had lived, and all the people died, “It would have pleased him well.” But that was argued more like a soldier than a logician.

Query 2. If you indeed love the creature for itself,—if you make it your end, and religion but a means—then the conclusion is rightly drawn upon you : but if you love the creature in reference to God, and see nothing in it separated from him, though sometimes your affections offend in the excess—this is consistent with sincere love to God. To love the creature inordinately; that is, to put it in God’s room, and make it a man’s end—this is the love of a carnal heart : to love it immoderately, that

is, to let out more affection to it than we ought, is sometimes the sin of the best hearts.

Query 3. Have not many souls feared as you do, that when Christ and creatures should stand as competitors, in some eminent trial, they should forsake Christ rather than the creature; and yet, when brought to that dilemma, have been able to cast all the world at their heels for Christ? Many of the martyrs had such fears—thus they were satisfied. The prevalency of love is best seen at parting: there may be more love to Christ in thy soul than thou art now aware off; and if God bring thee to such a pinch, thou mayest see it.

IV. A fourth ground of these sad conclusions is from hence,—that we find our hearts sometimes more straitened in private than in public duties. Oh! if my soul were sincere, its actings in duty would be uniform. I fear I am but a Pharisee upon this ground: it is sad, indeed, we should at any time find our hearts straitened in private. But,

Query 1. Do not all thine enlargements in duty, whether public or private, depend upon the Spirit, who is the Lord of influences; and according as he gives out, or holds back these influences, so art thou enlarged or straitened? And what if, sometimes, he please to give that in a public, which he withholds in a private duty, as long as thy soul is satisfied in neither, without communion with God, and the straitness of thy heart is indeed its burden,—doth that argue thee to be a hypocrite?

Query 2. Dost thou not make conscience of private duties, and set thyself as before the Lord in them? Indeed, if thou live in the constant neglect

or careless performance of them ; if thou art curious about public, and careless about private duties, that would be a sad sign. But when you have conscientiously performed, and often met with God in them, it will not follow that you are insincere, because that communion is sometimes interrupted. Besides,

Query 3. May there not be something at sometimes in a public, which is wanting in a private duty, to raise and advantage thine affections? God may sometimes make use of the melting affections of them with whom thou hearest or prayest, as petty instruments to move thy affections—this advantage is wanting in private,—therefore from hence, the case so standing, no such inference can be drawn.

V. Another ground is from those horrid injections of Satan, with which the soul is greatly perplexed. By these I may see what a heart I have. Can grace be where those are? Yes: Grace may be where such thoughts are, though not where they are lodged and consented to. Dost thou cry out under the burden? enter thy protest in heaven against them? strive to keep up holy and reverend thoughts to God? then it is violence, not a voluntary prostitution.

VI. The last ground of these sad conclusions, is, the Lord's long silence, and seeming denial of our long-depending suits and prayers. Or, if God had any regard to my soul, he would have heard my cries before now ! but I have no answer from him, therefore no interest in him. But stay, doubting soul :

Query 1. Have not many saints stumbled upon this stone before thee? “ I said, in my haste, I am cut off from before thine eyes: nevertheless thou heardest the voice of my supplication.” So the

church: "Thou coverest thyself with a cloud, that our prayers shall not pass through." "Then said I, I am cast out of thy sight." And may not you be mistaken in this matter as well as they?

Query 2. Though God's abhorring, and final rejecting prayer, be an argument of his abhorring the person that prays; yet dare we conclude so, from a mere suspension of the answer? God may bear long with "his own elect, that cry unto him day and night:" Luke xviii. 7.

Query 3. Can you deny, but that there are some signs appearing in your souls, even whilst God suspends his answer, that argue your prayers are not rejected by him? As, (1.) Though no answer come, yet you are still resolved to wait. You dare not say, as that profane wretch did, "This evil is of the Lord; why should I wait for him any longer?" (2.) You can clear and justify God still, and lay the reason and cause of his silence upon yourselves. So did David: "O my God, I cry in the day-time, and thou hearest not; and in the night, and am not silent. But thou art holy," &c. (3.) The suspension of God's answer makes you inquisitive into your own hearts. What evils are there that obstruct your prayers? So the church, Lam. iii. 8. "He shutteth out my prayer." And how doth this work? You may see, ver. 40. "Let us search and try our ways." Well, then, neither from hence may you conclude that God hath no love for your souls.

And thus I have shown you how to keep your hearts, in a dark and doubting season, from these desperate conclusions of unbelief. God forbid any false heart should encourage itself from these things.

It is our unhappiness, that, when we give saints and sinners their proper portions, that each of them are so prone to take up the other's part.

SEASON XI. The eleventh special season, calling for this diligence to keep your hearts, is when sufferings for religion come to a height; then look to your hearts: "All these are the beginning of sorrows. And they shall deliver you up to be afflicted, and shall kill you: and ye shall be hated of all nations for my name's sake. And then shall many be offended." When sufferings for religion grow hot, then blessed is he that is not offended in Christ. Troubles are then at a height: (1.) When a man's nearest friends and relations forsake and leave him. Micah vii. 5, 6. 2 Tim. iv. 16. When a man is engaged alone. (2.) When it comes to resisting to blood, Heb. xii. 4. (3.) When temptations are presented to us in our sufferings, Heb. xi. 37. (4.) When eminent persons for profession turn aside, and desert the cause of Christ, 2 Tim. ii. 19. (5.) When God hides his face in a suffering hour, Jer. xvii. 17. (6.) When Satan falls upon us with strong temptations, to question the grounds of our sufferings, or the soul's interest in Christ. Now, it is hard to keep the heart from turning back, and the steps from declining God's ways. The eleventh case then shall be this:

Case XI. How the heart may be kept from relapsing under the greatest sufferings for religion? If the bitterness of sufferings at any time cause thy soul to distaste the way of God, and take up thy thoughts of forsaking it, stay thine heart under that temptation, by propounding these eight questions solemnly to it:—

Quest. 1. What reproach and dishonour shall I pour upon Christ and religion, by deserting him at such a time as this?—This will proclaim to all the world, that how much soever I have boasted of the promises, yet, when it comes to the trial, I dare hazard nothing upon the credit of them; and how will this open the mouths of Christ's enemies to blaspheme? O better had I never been born, than that worthy name should be blasphemed through me! Shall I furnish the triumphs of the uncircumcised? Shall I make mirth in hell? O, if I did but value the name of Christ as much as many a wicked man values his own name, I could never endure to see it exposed to such contempt! Will proud dust and ashes venture death, yea, hell, rather than a blot upon their names? And shall I venture nothing to save the honour and reputation of Christ?

Quest. 2. Dare I violate my conscience to save my flesh! Who shall comfort me when conscience wounds me?—What comfort is there in life, liberty, or friends, when peace is taken away from the inner man? When Constantius threatened to cut off Samosatenus' right hand, if he would not subscribe somewhat that was against his conscience, he held up both his hands to the messenger that was sent, saying, He shall cut off both rather than I will do it: Farewell all peace, joy, and comfort, from that day forward. "Had Zimri peace that slew his master?" said Jezebel. So say I here, Had Judas peace? Had Spira peace? And shall you have peace if you tread in their steps? O consider what you do!

Quest. 3. Is not the public interest of Christ and religion infinitely more than any private interest of

my own?—It is a famous passage that of Terentius, captain to Adrian the emperor:—He presented a petition to Adrian, that the Christians might have a temple by themselves, to worship God apart from the Arians. The emperor tore his petition, and threw it away, bidding him to ask something for himself, and it should be granted: but he modestly gathered up the pieces of his petition again, and told him, “If he could not be heard in God’s cause, he would never ask any thing for himself.” Yea, even Tully, though a heathen, could say, “He would not accept even of immortality itself against the commonwealth.” O! if we had more public, we should not have such cowardly spirits.

Quest. 4. Did Jesus Christ serve me so, when, for my sake, he exposed himself to far greater sufferings than can be before me?—His sufferings were great indeed, he suffered from all hands, in all his offices, in every member, not only in his body, but in his soul: yea, the sufferings of his soul were the very soul of his sufferings;—witness the bloody sweat in the garden—witness the heart-melting and heaven-rending outcry upon the cross, “My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?” And yet he flinched not: “He endured the cross, despising the shame.” Alas! what are my sufferings compared with Christ’s? He hath drank up all that vinegar and gall that would make my sufferings bitter. When one of the martyrs was asked, why he was so merry at his death? “Oh,” said he, “it is because the soul of Christ was so heavy at his death.” Did Christ bear such a burden for me, with unbroken patience and constancy; and shall I shrink back from momentary and light afflictions for him?

Quest. 5. Is not eternal life worth the suffering of a moment's pain?—If I suffer with him, I shall reign with him. Oh how will men venture life and limb for a fading crown, swim through seas of blood to a throne! And will I venture nothing—suffer nothing for the “crown of glory that fadeth not away?” My dog will follow my horse's heels from morning to night, take many a weary step through mire and dirt, rather than leave me, though at night all he gets by it is but bones and blows. If my soul had any true greatness, any sparks of generosity in it, how would it despise the sufferings of the way, for the glory of the end! How would it break down all difficulties before it, whilst, by an eye of faith, it sees “the forerunner who is already entered,” standing, as it were, upon the walls of heaven, with the crown in his hand, saying, “He that overcometh shall inherit all things.” Come on then, my soul, come on; there is eternal life laid up for them that “by patient continuance in well-doing, seek for glory, honour and immortality.”

Quest. 6. Can I so easily cast off the society and company of the saints, and give the right hand of fellowship to the wicked?—How can I part with such lovely companions as these have been? How often have I been benefited by their counsels? How often refreshed, warmed, and quickened, by their company? How often have I fasted and prayed with them? What sweet counsel have I taken with them, and gone to the house of God in company? And shall I now shake hands with them, and say, Farewell all ye saints for ever, I shall never be among you more: come drunkards, blasphemers, persecutors, you shall be my everlasting companions? O rather let my

body and soul be rent asunder, than that ever I should say thus to the excellent of the earth, in whom is all my delight.

Quest. 7. Have I seriously considered the terrible scripture comminations against backsliders?—O my heart! darest thou turn thy back upon the very points of such threatenings as these? “Thus saith the Lord, Cursed be the man that trusteth in man, and maketh flesh his arm, and whose heart departeth from the Lord: for he shall be like the heath in the desert, and shall not see when good cometh;” that is, The curse of God shall wither him root and branch. And, “if we sin wilfully after we have received the knowledge of the truth, there remaineth no more sacrifice for sins, but a certain fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation, which shall devour the adversaries.” And, again, “If any man draw back, my soul shall have no pleasure in him.” As if he should say, ‘Take him world, take him devil for your own, I have no delight in him.’ O who dare draw back, when God has hedged up the way with such terrible threats as these!

Quest. 8. Can I look Christ in the face in the day of judgment, if I desert him now?—“He that is ashamed of me, and of my words, in this adulterous and sinful generation, of him shall the Son of man be ashamed, when he cometh in the glory of his Father, with the holy angels.” Yet a little while, and you shall see the sign of the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven, with power and great glory. The last trump shall sound, the dead, both small and great, even all that sleep in the dust, shall awake, and come before that great white throne, on which

Christ shall sit on that great day. And now, do but imagine thou sawest the trembling knees, and quivering lips, of guilty sinners ! Imagine thou heardest the dreadful sentence of the Judge upon them, “ Go, ye cursed ! ” &c. And then a cry—the weeping, wailing, and wringing of hands, that there shall be. Wouldst thou desert Christ now, to protract a poor miserable life upon earth ? If the word of God be true, if the sayings of Christ be sealed and faithful, this shall be the portion of the apostate. It is an easy thing to stop the mouth of conscience now, but will it be easy to stop the mouth of the Judge then ? Thus keep thy heart, that it depart not from the living God.

SEASON XII. The twelfth season of looking diligently to our hearts, and keeping them with greatest care, is the time of sickness. When a child of God draws nigh to eternity, when there are but a few sands more in the upper part of his glass to run down, now Satan busily bestirs himself. Of him it may be said, as of the natural serpent, He is never seen at his full length till dying. And now his great design, since he cannot win the soul from God, is to discourage, and make it unwilling to go to God : though the gracious soul, with Jacob, should then rouse up itself upon a dying bed, and rejoice that the marriage-day of the Lamb is now almost come ; though it should then say, with dying Austin, “ I despise life to be with Christ.” Or as dying Milius, when one asked him whether he were willing to die ? “ O,” said he, “ let him be unwilling to die, who is unwilling to go to Christ. But, O ! what shrinking from death. What loathness to depart may some-

times, indeed too frequently, be observed in the people of God! How loath are some of them to take death by the cold hand! If such a liberty were indulged to us, not to be dissolved till we dissolve ourselves, when should we say, with St. Paul, “I desire to be dissolved?” Well, then, the last case shall be this:

Case XII. How the people of God, in times of sickness, may get their hearts loose from all earthly engagements, and persuade them into a willingness to die.

And there are seven arguments which I shall urge upon the people of God, at such a time as this, to make them cheerfully entertain the messenger of death, and die as well as live like saints. And the first is this:

Arg. 1. First, The harmlessness of death to the people of God.—Though it keeps its dart, it hath lost its sting. A saint (to allude to that in Isa. xi. 8.) may “play upon the hole of the asp, and put his hand into the cockatrice’ den.” Death is the cockatrice, or asp; the grave is his hole or den: a saint need not fear to put his hand boldly into it; it hath left and lost its sting in the sides of Christ: “O death! where is thy sting?” Why art thou afraid, O saint, that this sickness may be thy death, as long as thou knowest that the death of Christ is the death of death? Indeed, if thou didst die in thy sins, as John viii. 21.; if death as a king did reign over thee, Rom. v. 14.; if it could feed upon thee, as the lion doth upon the prey he hath taken, as Psalm xlix. 14.; “if hell followed the pale horse;” then thou mightest well startle, and shrink back from it: but

when God hath put away thy sins from thee, “as far as the east is from the west;” as long as there is no other evil left in death for thee to encounter with, but bodily pain; as long as the Scriptures represent it to thee under such harmless and easy notions,—as the putting off thy clothes, and “lying down to sleep upon thy bed,”—why shouldst thou be afraid? There is as much difference betwixt death to the people of God, and others, as betwixt the unicorn’s horn, when it is upon the head of that fierce beast, and when it is in the apothecaries’ shops, where it is made salubrious and medicinal.

Arg. 2. Thy heart may be kept from shrinking back at such a time as this, by considering the necessity of death, in order to the full fruition of God.

Whether thou art willing to die or not, I assure thee there is no other way to obtain the full satisfaction of thy soul, and complete its happiness,—till the hand of death do thee the kind office to draw aside the curtain of thy flesh, thy soul cannot see God. This animal life stands betwixt him and thee: “Whilst we are at home in the body, we are absent from the Lord.” Thy body must be refined, and cast into a new mould, else that new wine of heavenly glory would break it. Paul, in his highest rapture, 2 Cor. xii. 4. when he heard things unutterable, was then but as a stander by, a looker on; not admitted into the company as one of them. But as the angels are in our assemblies, so was Paul in that glorious assembly above, and no otherwise; and yet even for this, he must, as it were, be taken out of the body, unclothed for a little time, to have a glimpse of that glory, and then put on his clothes again. O, then,

who would not be willing to die for a full sight and enjoyment of God? Methinks thy soul should look and sigh, like a prisoner, through the grates of this mortality: "O that I had wings like a dove, then would I fly away, and be at rest." Most men need patience to die, but a saint, that understands what death admits him to, should rather need patience to live. Methinks he should often look out, and listen on a death-bed for his Lord's coming; and, when he receives the news of his approaching change, should say, "The voice of my beloved! behold, he cometh leaping over the mountains, skipping over the hills."

Arg. 3. Another argument, persuading to this willingness, is the immediate succession of a more excellent and glorious life.

It is but a wink, and you shall see 'God. Your happiness shall not be deferred till the resurrection, but, as soon as the body is dead, the gracious soul is swallowed up in life. When once you have loosed from this shore, in a few moments your souls will be wafted over, upon the wings of angels, to the other shore of a glorious eternity: "I desire to be dissolved, and to be with Christ." Did the soul and body die together, as Berilius taught; or did they sleep till the resurrection, as others have groundlessly fancied; it had been a madness for Paul to desire a dissolution for the enjoyment of Christ: for, if this were so, he enjoyed more of Christ whilst his soul dwelt in its fleshly tabernacle, than he should out of it.

There are but two ways of the soul's living, known in Scripture; namely, the life of *faith*, and the life of *vision*, 1 Cor. v. 5. These two divide all time, both

present and future, betwixt them, 1 Cor. xiii. 12. If, when faith fails, sight should not immediately succeed, what would become of the unbodied soul? But, blessed be God! this great heart-establishing truth is evidently revealed in Scripture, Luke xxiii. 43. You have Christ's promise, John xiv. 3. "I will come and receive you to myself." O what a change will a few moments make upon your condition! Rouse up, dying saint! when thy soul is come out a little farther, when it shall stand, like Abraham, at its tent-door, the angels of God shall soon be with it. The souls of the elect are, as it were, put out to the angels to nurse, and when they die, these angels carry them home again to their Father's house. If an angel were caused to fly swiftly, to bring a saint the answer of his prayer, Dan. ix. 22. how much more will the angels come post from heaven, to receive and transfer the praying soul itself!

Arg. 4. Farther, it may much conduce to thy willingness to die, to consider, that by death God oftentimes hides his people out of the way of all temptations and troubles upon earth. "Write, From henceforth, blessed are the dead that die in the Lord." It is God's usual way, when some extraordinary calamities are coming upon the world, to set his people out of harm's way beforehand: "Merciful men are taken away from the evil to come." So Micah vii. 1, 2. when such an evil time comes, as is there described, that "they all lie in wait for blood, and every man hunts his brother with a net," God, by an act of favour, houses his people beforehand. Dost thou know what evil may be in the earth which thou art so loath to leave? Thy God removes thee for

thy great advantage: thou art disbanded by death, and called off the field; other poor saints must stand to it, and endure a great fight of afflictions.

It is observed, that Methuselah died the very year before the flood; Augustine, a little before the sacking of Hippo; Pareus, just before the taking of Heidelberg. Luther observes, that all the apostles died before the destruction of Jerusalem; and Luther himself died before the wars broke out in Germany. It may be the Lord sees the tender heart cannot endure to see the misery, or bear the temptations, that are coming, and, therefore, will now gather thee to thy grave in peace; and yet wilt thou cry, O spare me a little longer!

Arg. 5. If yet thy hand hang back, consider the great advantage you will have by death, above all that ever you enjoyed on earth. And that, 1. As to your communion with God,—2. As to your communion with saints.

1. For your communion with God. The time of perfecting that is now come. Thy soul shall shortly stand before the face of God, and have the immediate emanations and beamings forth of his glory upon it. Here thy soul is remote from God; the beams of his glory strike it but obliquely and feebly; but shortly it will be under the line, and there the sun shall stand still as it did in Gideon: there shall be no cloudings nor declinings of it. O how should this fill thy soul with desires of being unclothed.

2. As for the enjoyment of saints: here indeed we have fellowship with them of the lower form; but that fellowship is so dissweetened by remaining corruptions, that there is no satisfaction in it. As it is

the greatest plague that can befall a hypocrite to live in a pure church, so it is the greatest vexation to the spirit of a saint to live in a corrupt and disordered church. But when death hath admitted you into that glorious assembly of "the spirits of just men made perfect," you shall have the desire of your hearts. Here you cannot fully close with one another; yea, you cannot fully close with your own souls. O what discords, jarrings, censurings, are here! what perfect blessed harmony there! In heaven each saint loves another as himself; they are altogether lovely. O my soul, haste thee away from the lions' dens, from the mountains of Bether, from divided saints, to those mountains of myrrh and hills of frankincense! Thou art now going unto thine own people, as the apostle's phrase imports, 2 Cor. v. 8.

Arg. 6. If all this will not do, consider what heavy burdens death will ease thy shoulders of.

"In this tabernacle we groan, being burdened."

1. With bodily distempers. How true do we find that of Theophrastus, "The soul pays a dear rent for the tenement it now lives in!" But glorified bodies are clogged with no indispositions: death is the best physician; it will cure thee of all diseases at once.

2. With the indwelling of sin. This makes us groan from the very bowels: but "he that is dead is freed from sin." Hath justification destroyed its damning power, and sanctification its reigning power? so glorification destroys its very being and existence.

3. We groan under temptations here; but, as soon as we are out of the body, we are out of the reach of temptation. When once thou art got into heaven, thou mayest say, Now, Satan, I am there where

thou canst not come. For as the damned in hell are so fixed in sin and misery that their condition cannot be altered, so glorified saints are so fixed in holiness and glory that they cannot be shaken. 4. Here we groan under various troubles and afflictions; but then the days of our mourning are ended; God shall wipe away all tears from our eyes. O then let us haste away, that we may be at rest!

Arg. 7. If still thou linger, like Lot in Sodom, then, lastly, examine all the pleas and pretences for a longer time on earth. Why art thou unwilling to die?

Obj. 1. O I have many relations in the world! I know not what will become of them when I am gone.

Sol. If thou art troubled about their bodies and outward condition, why should not that word satisfy thee? "Leave thy fatherless children to me, I will preserve them alive; and let thy widows trust in me." Luther, in his last will and testament, hath this expression: "Lord, thou hast given me wife and children: I have nothing to leave them, but I commit them unto thee. O Father of the fatherless, and judge of widows, nourish, keep, and teach them!" Or, art thou troubled for their souls? Thou canst not convert them if thou shouldst live; and God can make thy prayer and counsels to live and take place upon them when thou art dead.

Obj. 2. I would fain live to do God more service in the world.

Sol. Well: but if he have no more service for thee to do here, why shouldst thou not say, with David, "If he have no delight to use me any farther, here am

I; let him do what seemeth him good." In this world thou hast no more to do; but he is calling thee to a higher service and employment in heaven: and what thou wouldst do for him here, he can do that by other hands.

Obj. 3. I am not yet fully ready: I am not as a bride completely adorned for the bridegroom.

Sol. Thy justification is complete already, though thy sanctification be not so. And the way to make it so, is to die: for, till then, it will have its defects and wants.

Obj. 4. O but I want assurance! If I had that, I could die presently.

Sol. Yea, there it sticks indeed. But then consider, that a hearty willingness to leave all the world to be freed from sin, and be with God, is the next way to that desired assurance: no carnal person was ever willing to die upon this ground.

And thus I have finished those cases which so nearly concern the people of God, in the several conditions of their life, and taught them how to keep their hearts in all. I shall next apply the whole.

I. Use—Information.

You have heard that the keeping of the heart is the great work of a Christian, in which the very soul and life of religion consists, and without which all other duties are of no value with God. Hence then I shall infer, to the consternation of hypocrites and formal professors,

1. That the pains and labours which many persons have taken in religion, are but lost labour, and pains to no purpose, such as will never turn to account.

Many great services have been performed, many glorious works are wrought by men, which yet are utterly rejected by God, and shall never stand upon record in order to an eternal acceptation, because they took no heed to keep their hearts with God in those duties. This is that fatal rock, upon which thousands of vain professors have split themselves eternally: they are curious about the externals of religion, but regardless of their hearts. O how many hours have some professors spent in hearing, praying, reading, conferring! and yet, as to the main end of religion, as good they had sat still and done nothing. For all this signifies nothing; the great work, I mean heart-work, being all the while neglected. Tell me, thou vain professor, when didst thou shed a tear for the deadness, hardness, unbelief, or earthliness of thy heart? Thinkest thou such an easy religion can save thee? If so, we may invert Christ's words, and say, "Wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to life; and many there be that go in thereat." Hear me, thou self-deluding hypocrite—thou that hast put off God with heartless duties—thou that hast acted in religion as if thou hadst been blessing an idol, that couldst not search and discover thy heart—thou that hast offered to God but the skin of the sacrifice, not the marrow, fat, and inwards of it,—how wilt thou abide the coming of the Lord? How wilt thou hold up thy head before him, when he shall say, O thou dissembling false-hearted man, how couldst thou profess religion? With what face

couldst thou so often tell me thou lovest me, when thou knewest all the while, in thine own conscience, that thine heart was not with me. O tremble to think what a fearful judgment it is to be given over to a heedless and careless heart; and then to have religious duties, instead of a rattle, to quiet and still the conscience!

2. Hence also infer, for the humiliation even of upright hearts, that unless the people of God spend more time and pains about their hearts than generally and ordinarily they do, they are never like to do God much service, or be owners of much comfort in this world.

I may say of that Christian that is remiss and careless in keeping his heart, as Jacob said of Reuben, "Thou shalt not excel." It grieves me to see how many Christians there are, that go up and down dejected and complaining, that live at a poor low rate both of service and comfort. And how can they expect it should be otherwise, as long as they live at such a careless rate? O how little of their time is spent in the closet, in searching, humbling, and quickening their hearts!

You say your hearts are dead: and do you wonder they are so, as long as you keep them not with the Fountain of life? If your bodies had been dieted as your souls have been, they would have been dead too. Never expect better hearts till you take more pains with them: he that will not have the *sweat*, must not expect the *sweet* of religion.

O Christians! I fear your zeal and strength have run in the wrong channel. I fear most of us may take up the Church's complaint: "They made me

the keeper of the vineyards; but mine own vineyard have I not kept." Two things have eaten up the time and strength of the professors of this generation, and sadly diverted them from heart-work. (1.) Fruitless controversies started by Satan, I doubt not to this very purpose, to take us off from practical godliness, to make us puzzle our heads when we should be searching our hearts. O how little have we minded that of the apostle, "It is a good thing that the heart be established with grace; not with meats"—that is, with disputes and controversies about meats—"which have not profited them that have been occupied therein." O how much better is it to see men *live exactly*, than to hear them *dispute subtly*! These unfruitful questions, how have they rended the churches; wasted time and spirits; and called Christians off from their main business, from looking to their own vineyard? What think ye, sirs? Had it not been better, if the questions agitated among the people of God of late days had been such as these?—How shall a man discern the special, from the common operations of the Spirit? How may a soul discern its first declinings from God? How may a backsliding Christian recover his first love? How may the heart be preserved from unseasonable thoughts in duty? How may a bosom sin be discovered and mortified? &c. Would not this have tended more to the credit of religion, and comfort of your souls? O, it is time to repent and be ashamed of this folly! When I read what Suarez, a papist, said, who wrote many volumes of disputations, that he prized the time he set apart for the searching and examining of his heart, in reference to God, above

all the time that ever he spent in other studies—I am ashamed to find the professors of this age yet insensible of their folly. Shall the conscience of a Suarez feel a relenting pang, for strength and time so ill employed? and shall not yours? This is it your ministers long since warned you of: your spiritual nurses were afraid of the rickets, when they saw your heads only to grow, and your hearts to wither. O when will God beat our swords into plough-shares! I mean, our disputes and contentions, into practical godliness. (2.) Another cause of neglecting our hearts, hath been earthly incumbrances. The heads and hearts of many have been filled with such a crowd and noise of worldly business, that they have sadly and sensibly declined and withered in their zeal, love, and delight in God, in their heavenly, serious, and profitable way of conversing with man. O how hath this wilderness entangled us! our discourses and conferences; nay, our very prayers and duties have a tang of it: we have had so much work without doors, that we have been able to do but little within. It was the sad complaint of a holy one, (Mr. Strong,) ‘O,’ saith he, ‘it is sad to think, how many precious opportunities I have lost, how many sweet motions and admonitions of the Spirit I have passed over unfruitfully, and made the Lord to speak in vain. In the secret illapses of his Spirit, the Lord hath called upon me, but my worldly thoughts did still lodge within me, and there was no place within my heart for such calls of God.’ Surely there is a way of enjoying God, even in our worldly employments. God would never have put us upon them to our loss: Enoch walked with God, and be-

gat sons and daughters. He walked with God, but did not retire, and separate himself from the things of this life; and the angels that are employed by Christ, in the things of this world, (for the spirit of the living creatures is in the wheels,) they are finite creatures, and cannot be in a twofold *ubi* at one time, yet they lose nothing of the beatific vision all the time of their administration; for “their angels (even whilst they are employed for them) behold the face of their Father which is in heaven.” We need not lose our visions by our employments, if the fault were not our own. Alas! that ever Christians, who stand at the door of eternity, and have more work upon their hands than this poor moment of interposing time is sufficient for, should yet be filling both their heads and hearts with trifles.

3. Hence also, I infer, for the awakening of all, that if the keeping of the heart be the great work of a Christian, then there are but few real Christians in the world.

Indeed, if every one that hath learned the dialect of Christianity, and can talk like a saint; if every one that hath gifts and parts, and by the common assisting presence of the Spirit, can preach, pray, or discourse like a Christian: in a word, if such as associate themselves with the people of God, and delight in ordinances, may pass for Christians,—the number then is great.

But, alas! to what a small number will they shrink, if you judge them by this rule! How few are there that make conscience of keeping their hearts, watching their thoughts, judging their ends, &c. O there be but few closet men among professors! It is far

easier for men to be reconciled to any duties in religion than to these. The profane part of the world will not so much as touch with the outside of religious duties—much less with this: and for the hypocrite, though he be polite and curious about those externals, yet you can never persuade him to this inward work, this difficult work, to which there is no inducement by human applause; this work, that would quickly discover what the hypocrite cares not to know: so that, by a general consent, this heart-work is left to the hands of a few secret ones, and I tremble to think in how few hands it is.

II. *Use—Exhortation.*

If the keeping of the heart be so important a business; if such choice advantages accrue to you thereby; if so many dear and precious interests be wrapt up in it,—then let me call upon the people of God every where to fall close to this work.

O study your hearts, watch your hearts, keep your hearts. Away with fruitless controversies, and all idle questions; away with empty names, and vain shows; away with unprofitable discourse, and bold censures of others. Turn in upon yourselves; get into your closet, and now resolve to dwell there. You have been strangers to this work too long, you have trifled about the borders of religion too long; this world hath detained you from your great work too long: will you now resolve to look better to your hearts? Will you haste and come out of the crowds of business, and clamours of the world? and retire yourselves more than you have done? O that this day you would resolve upon it!

Reader, methinks I should prevail with thee. All that I beg for is but this, that thou wouldst step aside a little oftener to talk with God and thine own heart; that thou wouldst not suffer every trifle to divert thee; that thou wouldst keep a more true and faithful account of thy thoughts and affections; that thou wouldst but seriously demand of thine own heart, at least every evening, O my heart, where hast thou been to-day? whither hast thou made a road to-day?—If all that hath been said, by way of inducement, be not enough, I have yet more motives to offer you; and the first is this:

Motive 1. The studying, observing, and diligent keeping of your own hearts, will marvellously help your understanding in the deep mysteries of religion.

An honest, well-experienced heart, is a singular help to a weak head: such a heart will serve you instead of a commentary, upon a great part of the Scriptures. By this means you shall far better understand the things of God, than the learned rabbies and profound doctors (if graceless and inexperienced) ever did; you shall not only have a more clear, but a more sweet perception and gust of them. A man may discourse orthodoxly and profoundly of the nature and effects of faith, the troubles and comforts of conscience, the sweetness of communion with God, that never felt the efficacy and sweet impression of these things upon his own spirit. But O how dark and dry are these notions, compared with his upon whose heart they have been acted! When such a man reads David's Psalms, or Paul's Epistles, there he finds his own objections made and answered. O, saith he, these holy men speak my very heart! their

doubts were mine, their troubles mine, and their experiences mine. I remember Chrysostome, speaking to his people of Antioch about some choice experiences, useth this expression: "Those that are initiated know what I say; experience is the best schoolmaster." O then! study your hearts, keep your hearts.

Motive 2. The study and observation of your own hearts will be an antidote to you against the dangerous and infecting errors of the times and places you live in.

For what think you is the reason that so many professors in England have departed from the faith, giving heed to fables; that so many thousands have been led away by the error of the wicked; that Jesuits and Quakers, who have sown corrupt doctrine, have had such plentiful harvests among us,—but because they have met with a company of empty notional professors, that never knew what belongs to practical godliness, and the study of their own hearts? If professors did but give diligence to study, search, and watch their own hearts, they would have that steadfastness of their own that Peter speaks of, 1 Pet. iii. 17.; and this would ballast and settle them, Heb. xiii. 9. Suppose a subtle Papist should talk to such of the dignity and merit of good works, could he ever work the persuasion of it into that heart that is conscious to itself of so much darkness, deadness, distraction, and unbelief, attending its best duties? It is a good rule, There is no disputing against taste. What a man hath felt and tasted, one cannot beat him off from by argument.

Motive 3. Your care and diligence in keeping your

hearts will prove one of the best evidences of your sincerity.

I know no external act of religion that differences the sound from the unsound professor. It is wonderful to consider, how far hypocrites go in all external duties, how plausibly they can order the outward man, hiding all their indecencies from the observation of the world. But then, they take no heed to their hearts; they are not in secret, what they appear to be in public; and before this trial no hypocrite can stand. It is confessed, they may in a fit, under a pang upon a death-bed, cry out of the wickedness of their hearts; but alas! there is no heed to be taken to these extorted complaints in our law; no credit is to be given to the testimony of one upon the rack, because it may be supposed that the extremity of the torture may make him say any thing to be eased: but if self-jealousy, care, and watchfulness, be the daily workings and frames of thy heart, it strongly argues the sincerity of it. For what but the sense of a divine eye, what but the real hatred of sin as sin, could put thee upon those secret duties which lie out of the observation of all creatures? If, then, it be a desirable thing in thine eyes to have a fair testimony of thine integrity, and to know of a truth that thou fearest God, then study thine heart, watch thy heart, keep thy heart.

Motive 4. How fruitful, sweet, and comfortable would all ordinances and duties be to us, if our hearts were better kept!

O what precious communion might you have with God every time you approach him, if your hearts were but in frame! You might then say with David, "My meditation of him shall be sweet." That which loses

all our comforts in ordinances and more secret duties, is the indisposedness of the heart. A Christian, whose heart is in a good frame, gets the start of all others that come with him in that duty. They strive hard to get up their hearts to God; now trying this argument upon them, and then that, to quicken and affect them, and sometimes go away as bad as they came. Sometimes the duty is almost ended before their hearts begin to stir or feel any warmth, quickening, or power from it; but all this while the prepared heart is at its work: this is he that ordinarily gets the sight of Christ in a sermon, the first seal from Christ in a sacrament, the first kiss from Christ in secret prayer. I tell you, and I tell you but what I have felt, that prayers and sermons would appear to you other manner of things than they do, did you but bring better ordered hearts to them. You would not go away dejected and drooping: O this hath been a lost day, a lost duty to me. If you had not lost your hearts it had not been so. If, then, the comfort of ordinances be sweet, look to your hearts, keep your hearts.

Motive 5. Acquaintance with your own hearts would be a fountain of matter to you in prayer.

A man that is diligent in heart-work, and knows the state of his own soul, will have a fountain-fulness of matter to supply him richly in all his addresses to God. His tongue shall not falter and make pause for want of matter: "My heart is inditing a good matter:" or, as Montanus renders the original, "My heart is boiling up good matter, like a living spring that is still bubbling up fresh water." And then, "My tongue is as the pen of a ready writer." Others

must pump their memories, rack their inventions, and are often at a loss when they have done all: but if thou hast kept and faithfully studied thine own heart, it will be with thee, as Job speaks in another case, “like bottles full of new wine, that want vent, which are ready to burst.” As holy matter flows plentifully, so more feelingly and sweetly from such a heart. When a heart-experienced Christian is mourning before God over some special heart-corruption, wrestling with God for the supply of some special inward want, he speaks not as other men do that have learned to pray by rote: their confessions and petitions are squeezed out; his drop freely, like pure honey from the comb. It is a happiness, then, to be with or near such a Christian. I remember Bernard, having given rules to prepare the heart for prayer, concludes them thus: “When thy heart is in this frame, then remember me.”

Motive 6. By this the decayed power of religion will be recovered again among professors, which is the most desirable sight in this world.

O that I might live to see that day, when professors shall not walk in a vain show; when they shall please themselves no more with a name to live, being spiritually dead; when they shall be no more, as many of them now are, a company of frothy, vain, and unserious persons: but the majestic beams of holiness, shining from their heavenly and serious conversations, shall awe the world, and command reverence from all that are about them; when they shall warm the hearts of those that come nigh them, so that men shall say, “God is in these men of a truth!” Well, such a time may again be expected, according to

that promise, “The people shall be all righteous.” But, till we pursue closer this great work of keeping our hearts, I am out of hopes of seeing those blessed days : I cannot expect better times, till God gives better hearts. Doth it not grieve you to see what a scorn religion is made in the world—what objects of contempt and scorn the professors of it are made in the world ?

Professors, would you recover your credit ? would you again obtain an honourable testimony in the consciences of your very enemies ? then keep your hearts, watch your hearts. It is the looseness, frothiness, and earthliness of your hearts that hath made your lives so. And this hath brought you under the contempt of the world : you first lose your sight of God and communion with him, then your heavenly and serious deportment among men ; and by that, your interest in their consciences. O then, for the credit of religion, for the honour of your profession, keep your hearts !

Motive 7. By diligence in keeping your hearts, we should prevent and remove the fatal scandals and stumbling-blocks out of the way of the world.

“Woe to the world,” saith Christ, “because of offences.” Doth not shame cover your faces ? do not your hearts bleed within you, to hear of the scandalous miscarriages of many loose professors ? Could you not, like Shem and Japheth, go backward with a garment to cover the shame of many professors ! How is that worthy name blasphemed ! James ii. 7. 2 Sam. xii. 13, 14. ; the hearts of the righteous saddened ! Psal. xxv. 3. Ezek. xxxvi. 20. ; by this the world fearfully prejudiced against Christ and religion ! the

bonds of death made fast upon their souls ! those that had a general love and liking to the ways of God startled and quite driven back, and thus soul-blood is shed ! “ Woe to the world ! ”

Yea, how are consciences of fallen professors plunged, and even overwhelmed in the deeps of trouble ! God inwardly excommunicating their souls from all comfortable fellowship with himself, and the joys of his salvation ! Infinite are the mischiefs that come by the scandalous lives of professors.

And what is the true cause and reason of all this, but the neglecting of their hearts ? Were our hearts better kept, all this would be prevented : had David kept his heart, he had not broken his bones. A negligent careless heart, must of necessity produce a disorderly scandalous life. I thank God for the freedom and faithfulness of a reverend brother,* in showing professors their manifold miscarriages ; and from my heart do wish, that when their wounds have been thoroughly searched by that probe, God would be pleased to heal them by this plaster. O professors ! if ever you will keep religion sweet, if ever you hope to recover the credit of it in the world, keep your hearts : either keep your hearts, or lose your credit ; keep your hearts, or lose your comforts ; keep your hearts, lest you shed soul-blood. What words can express the deep concerns, the wonderful consequences of this work ! Every thing puts a necessity, a solemnity, a beauty upon it.

Motive 8. A heart well kept will fit you for any condition God casts you into, or any service he hath to use you in.

* Gospel-glass.

He that hath learned how to keep his heart lowly, is fit for prosperity; and he that knows how to use and apply it to scripture promises and supports, is fit to pass through any adversity: he that can deny the pride and selfishness of his heart, is fit to be employed in any service for God. Such a man was Paul: he did not only spend his time in preaching to others, in keeping others' vineyards, but he looked to himself, kept his own vineyard: "Lest when I have preached to others, I myself should be a cast-away." And what an eminent instrument was he for God! he could turn his hand to any work, he could dexterously manage both an adverse and prosperous condition: "I know how to abound, and how to suffer want." Let the people deify him, it moves him not, unless to indignation; let them stone him, he can bear it: "If a man purge himself from these," saith he, "he shall be a vessel unto honour, sanctified, and meet for the master's use, and prepared unto every good work."

First, the heart must be purged; and then it is prepared for any service of God. When the heart of Isaiah was purified, which was the thing signified by the touching of his lips with a coal from the altar, then he was fit for God's work: "Here am I, send me." A man that hath not learned to keep his heart, put him upon any service for God, and if it be attended with honour, it shall swell up and overtop his spirit; if with suffering, it will exanimate and sink him.

Jesus Christ had an instrumental fitness for his Father's work, above all the servants that ever God employed. He was zealous in public work for God; so zealous, that sometimes he forgot to eat bread, yea,

that his friends thought he had been beside himself. But yet, he so carried on his public work, as not to forget his own private communion with God: and therefore you read, (Matt. xiv. 23.) that when he had been labouring all day, yet, after that, “he went up to a mountain apart to pray,—and was there alone.” O let the keepers of the vineyards look to their own vineyard! We shall never be so instrumental to the good of others, as when we are most diligent about our own souls.

Motive 9. If the people of God would more diligently keep their hearts, how exceedingly would the communion of saints be thereby sweetened!

How goodly then would be thy tents, O Jacob, and thy tabernacles, O Israel! Then, as it is prophesied of the Jews, “Men would say, we will go with you; for we have heard that God is among you.” It is the fellowship your souls have with the Father and with the Son, that draws out the desires of others after fellowship with you. I tell you, if saints would be persuaded to take more pains, and spend more time about their hearts, there would quickly be such a divine lustre upon the face of their conversations, that men would account it no small privilege to be with or near them.

It is the pride, passion, and earthliness of our hearts that have spoiled Christian fellowship. Whence is it, that when Christians meet they are often jarring and contending, but only from their unmortified passions? Whence are their uncharitable censures of their brethren, but only from self-ignorance? Why are they so rigid and unmerciful towards those that are fallen, but because they consider not themselves,

as the apostle speaks? Gal. vi. 1. Why is their discourse so frothy and unprofitable when they meet? Is not this from the earthliness and vanity of their hearts?

My brethren, these be the things that have spoiled Christian fellowship, and made it become a dry and sapless thing; so that many Christians are even weary of it, and are ready to say with the prophet, "O that I had a cottage in the wilderness," &c. "that I might leave my people, and go from them!" and with David, "My soul hath long dwelt with them that hate peace." This hath made them long for the grave, that they might go from them that are not their own people, to them that are their own people, as the original of that text imports, 2 Cor. v. 8.

But now, if professors would study their own hearts more, watch and keep them better, all this would be prevented, and the beauty and glory of communion again restored. They would divide no more, contend no more, censure rashly no more: when their hearts are in tune their thoughts will not jar. How charitable, pitiful, and tender will they be one of another, when every one is daily humbled under the evils of his own heart! Lord, hasten those much-desired days, and bless these counsels in order to them.

Motive 10. Lastly, by this the comforts of the Spirit, and precious influences of all ordinances, would be fixed, and much longer preserved in your souls than now they are.

Ah! what would I give that my soul might be preserved in that frame I sometimes find it in after an ordinance! "Sometimes, O Lord," saith one

of the fathers sweetly, “thou admittest me into the most inward, unusual, and sweet delights—to I know not what sweetness—which, were it perfected in me, I know not what it would be, or rather, what it would not be.” But, alas! the heart grows careless again, and quickly returns, like water removed from the fire, to its native coldness. Could you but keep those things for ever in your hearts, what Christians would you be, what lives would you live! And how is it that these things remain no longer with us? Doubtless it is because we suffer our hearts to take cold again. We should be as careful after an ordinance or duty to prevent this, as one that comes out of a hot bath, or great sweat, is of going out into the chill air. We have our hot and cold fits by turns; and what is the reason, but our unskilfulness and carelessness in keeping the heart?

It is a thousand pities that the ordinances of God, as to their quickening and comforting effects, should be like those human ordinances the apostle speaks of, that “perish in the using.” O then let me say to you, as Job, “Do the consolations of God seem small to you?” Look over these ten special benefits, weigh them in a just balance: are they small matters? Is it a small matter to have thy weak understanding assisted; thy endangered soul antidoted; thy sincerity cleared; thy communion with God sweetened; thy sails filled in prayer? Is it a small thing to have decayed power of godliness again recovered; all fatal scandals removed; an instrumental fitness to serve Christ obtained; the communion of saints restored to its primitive glory; and the influences of ordinances abiding in the souls of saints? If these

be no common blessings, no small benefits, then surely it is a great duty to “keep the heart with all diligence.”

III. *Use—Direction.*

The next use shall be for direction to some special means for the keeping of the heart. And here, besides what hath been hinted in the explication of the duty at the beginning of this discourse, to which I refer the reader, and all those directions throughout the whole appropriated to particular cases and seasons, I shall farther add several other general means, of excellent use to this end—and the first is this :

Means 1. Would you thus keep your hearts as hath been persuaded, then furnish your hearts richly with the word of God, which is their best preservative against sin.

Keep the word, and the word will keep you. As the first receiving of the word regenerated your hearts, so the keeping of the word within you will preserve your hearts. “Let the word of Christ dwell richly in you.” Let it dwell, not tarry with you for a night : and let it dwell richly or plentifully—in all that is of it, in its commands, promises, threats—in all that is in you, in your understanding, memories, consciences, affections ; and then it will preserve your hearts. “Thy word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against thee.” It is the slipperiness of our hearts, in reference to the word, that causes so many slips in our lives. Conscience cannot be urged or awed with forgotten truths ; but keep it in the heart, and it will keep both heart and life upright : “The

law of his God is in his heart; none of his steps shall slide." Or, if he do, the word will recover the straying heart again: "Then Peter remembered the words of Jesus, and wept bitterly." We never lose our hearts, till they have first lost the efficacious and powerful impressions of the word.

Means 2. Call your hearts frequently to an account, if ever you mean to keep them with God.

Those that put a stock into the hands of unfaithful or suspicious servants, will be sure to make short reckonings with them: "The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked." O it is as necessary as sweet, that we and our reins, that is, we and our secret thoughts, should confer together every night! We should call our hearts to account every evening, and say, O my heart! where hast thou been to-day? where have thy thoughts been wandering to-day? what account canst thou give of them? O naughty heart, vain heart! couldst thou not abide by the Fountain of delights? Is there better entertainment with the creature than with God? The oftener the heart meets with rebukes and checks for wandering, the less it will wander. If every vain thought were retracted with a sigh, every excursion of the heart from God with a severe check, it would not dare so boldly and frequently to digress and step aside. Those actions which are committed with reluctance, are not committed with frequency.

Means 3. He that will keep his heart, must take heed of plunging himself into such a multiplicity of earthly business as he cannot manage, without neglecting his main business.

It cannot be imagined he should keep his heart

with God, that hath lost himself in a wood of earthly business. Take heed you do not pinch your souls, by gratifying the immoderate desires of your flesh. I wish many Christians could truly say, what a heathen once did, “I do not give, but only lend myself to my business.” It is said Germanicus reigned in the hearts of the Romans, Tiberius only in their provinces. Though the world be in your hands, let it not jostle Christ out of your hearts.

Take heed, Christian, lest thy shop steal away thy heart from thy closet. God never intended earthly employments for a stop, but rather for a step to heavenly ones. O let not Aristippus the heathen arise in judgment against thee, who said, “He would rather neglect his means than his mind; his farm than his soul.” If thy ship be overladen, thou must cast some overboard: more business than thou canst well manage, is like more meat than thou canst well digest, which will quickly make a sickly soul.

Means 4. He that means to keep his heart, must carefully observe its first declinings from God, and stop it there.

He that will find his house in good repair, must stop every chink as soon as discovered; and he that will keep his heart, must not let a vain thought be long neglected. The serpent of heart-apostacy is best killed in the egg of a small remission. O if many poor decayed Christians had looked to their hearts in time, they had never come to that sad pass they now are! We may say of heart-neglects, as the apostle doth of vain babblings, that they increase to more and more ungodliness. *Nemo repente fit turpissimus*: Little sins neglected will quickly become great

and masterless. The greatest crocodile once lay in an egg, the greatest oak was once but an acorn. The firing of a small train of powder may blow up all, by leading to a greater quantity. Men little think what a proud, vain, wanton, or worldly thought may grow to. “Behold, how great a matter a little fire kindles !”

Means 5. Take heed of losing the liveliness and sweetness of your communion with God, lest thereby your hearts be loosed off from God.

The heart is a hungry and restless thing; it will have something to feed upon. If it enjoy nothing from God, it will hunt for something among the creatures; and there it often loses itself, as well as its end. There is nothing more engages the heart to a constancy and evenness in walking with God, than the sweetness which it tastes therein: as the Gauls, when once they tasted the sweet wine of Italy, could never be satisfied till they conquered the country where it grew.

It is true, conscience of duty may keep the heart from neglecting it; but when there is no higher motive, it drives on deadly, and is filled with distractions. That which we delight in, we are never weary of; as is evident in the motions of the heart to earthly things, where the wheels, being oiled with delight, run nimbly, and have often need of trigging. The motions of the heart upward would be as free, if its delight in heavenly things were as great.

Means 6. Habituate thy heart to spiritual meditations, if thou wouldst have it freed from those burdensome diversions.

By this means you will get a facility and dexterity

in heart-work. It is a pity those smaller portions of our time betwixt solemn duties should lie upon our hands, and be rendered useless to us. O learn to save, and be good husbands upon your thoughts ! To this purpose Boyle speaks : “ These parentheses, which happen to come between the more solemn passages (whether business or recreations) of human life, are wont to be lost by most men, for want of a due value for them ; and even by good men, for want of skill to preserve them. For though they do not properly despise them, yet they neglect or lose them, for want of knowing how to rescue them, or what to do with them. But although grains of sand and ashes be, apart, but of a despicable smallness, and liable to be scattered and blown away, yet the skilful artificer, by a vehement fire, brings numbers of those to afford him that noble substance, glass, by whose help we may both see ourselves and our blemishes lively represented, (as in looking-glasses) ; and discern celestial objects, (as with telescopes) ; and with the sun-beams kindle disposed materials, (as with burning-glasses.) So, when these little fragments or parcels of time, which, if not carefully looked to, would be dissipated and lost, come to be managed by a skilful contemplator, and to be improved by the celestial fire of devotion, they may be so ordered as to afford us both looking-glasses to dress our souls by, and prospectives to discover heavenly wonders, and incentives to inflame our hearts with zeal.”—Thus far he.

Something of that nature I have under hand, for a public benefit, if God give life to finish and opportunity to produce it. Certainly this is a great advantage for the keeping of the heart with God.

IV. *Use—Consolation.*

I shall now close the whole with a word or two of consolation to all diligent and serious Christians that faithfully and closely apply heart-work—that are groaning and weeping in secret over the hardness, pride, earthliness, and vanity of their hearts; that are fearing and trembling over the experienced deceitfulness and falseness of them, whilst other vain professors' eyes are abroad, their time and strength eaten up by fruitless disputes and earthly employments; or at best by a cold and formal performance of some heartless and empty duties. Poor Christian, I have three things to offer thee in order to thy support and comfort; and doubtless either of them alone, mixed with faith, is sufficient to comfort thee over all the trouble thou hast with thine own heart.

Comfort 1. This argues thy heart to be upright and honest, whatever thy gifts and abilities are.

It is uprightness of heart will comfort thee upon a death-bed. “Then he turned his face to the wall, and prayed to the Lord, saying, Remember now, O Lord, how I have walked before thee in truth, and with a perfect heart,” &c.

I am really of his mind who said, “Might I have my wish, I would prefer the most despicable and sordid work of a rustic Christian, before all the victories and triumphs of Alexander or Cæsar;” yea, let me add, before all the elaborated duties and excellent gifts of vain professors, before the tongues of men and angels: it will signify more to my comfort to spend one solitary hour in mourning before the

Lord over heart-corruption, than many hours in a seeming zealous, but really dead performance of common duties, with the greatest enlargements and richest embellishments of parts and gifts.

By this very thing Christ distinguishes the formal and serious Christian, Matt. vi. 5. The one is for the street and synagogue, for the observation and applause of men, but the other is a closet man; he drives on a home trade, a heart trade. Never be troubled then for the want of those things that a man may have, and be eternally damned; but rather bless God for that which none but the favourites and darlings of heaven have: many a one is now in hell that had a better head than thine, and many a one now in heaven that complained of as bad a heart as thine.

Comf. 2. Know farther for thy comfort, that God would never leave thee under so many heart troubles and burdens, if he intended not thy real benefit thereby.

Thou art often crying out, Lord, why is it thus? why go I mourning all the day, having sorrow in my heart? thus long have I been exercised with hardness of heart, and to this day have not obtained a broken heart. Many years have I been praying and striving against vain thoughts, yet am still infested and perplexed with them. O when shall I get a better heart! I have been in travail, and brought forth but wind: I have obtained no deliverance, neither have the corruptions of my heart fallen. I have brought this heart many times to prayers, sermons, and sacraments, expecting and hoping for a cure from them, and still my sore runneth and ceaseth not.

Pensive soul! let this comfort thee: thy God de-

signs thy benefit, even by these occasions of thy sad complaints. For, 1. Hereby he would let thee see what thy heart by nature is and was, and therein take notice how much thou art beholden to free grace. He leaves thee under these exercises of spirit that thou mayest lie as with thy face upon the ground, admiring that ever the Lord of glory should take so vile a creature into his bosom. Thy base heart, if it be good for nothing else, yet serves to commend and set off the unsearchable riches of free grace. 2. This serves to beat thee off continually from resting, yea, or but glancing upon thine own righteousness or excellency. The corruption of thy heart, working in all thy duties, makes thee sensibly to feel that the bed is too short, and the covering too narrow. Were it not for those reflections thou hast after duties, upon the dulness and distractions of thine heart in them, how apt wouldst thou be to fall in love with, and admire thine own performances and enlargements! for if, notwithstanding these, thou hast much to do with the pride of thy heart, how much more, if such humbling and self-abasing considerations were wanting! And lastly, This tends to make thee the more compassionate and tender towards others. Perhaps thou wouldst have little pity for the distresses and soul-troubles of others, if thou hadst less experience of thine own.

Comf. 3. To conclude, God will shortly put a blessed end to all these troubles, cares, and watchings.

The time is coming when thy heart shall be as thou wouldst have it; when thou shalt be discharged of these cares, fears, and sorrows, and never cry out, Oh! my hard, my proud, my vain, my earthly heart,

any more ; when all darkness shall be banished from thine understanding, and thou shalt clearly discover all truths in God, that crystal ocean of truth ; when all vanity shall be purged perfectly out of thy thoughts, and they be everlastingly, ravishingly, and delightfully entertained and exercised upon that supreme goodness, and infinite excellency of God, from whom they shall never start any more like a broken bow. And as for thy pride, passion, earthliness, and all other the matters of thy complaint and trouble, it shall be said of them as of the Egyptians to Israel, “ Stand still, and see the salvation of God.” These corruptions thou seest to-day, henceforth thou shalt see them no more for ever : when thou shalt lay down thy weapons of prayers, tears, and groans, and put on the armour of light, not to fight but triumph in.

Lord ! when shall this blessed day come ? How long ? how long ? Holy and True ! My soul waiteth for thee. “ Come, my Beloved, and be thou like a roe or a young hart upon the mountains of Bethel.” Amen.

THE
TOUCHSTONE OF SINCERITY ;
OR, THE
SIGNS OF GRACE,
AND
SYMPTOMS OF HYPOCRISY.

EPISTLE TO THE READER.



AMONG the difficulties and severities of true religion, the faithful searching and diligent keeping of our hearts are found in the first and highest rank of difficulties. These two take up the main work of a Christian betwixt them. I had hopes that these Essays for the searching of the heart, might much sooner have followed my former Treatise for keeping the heart.* But Providence has reserved it for the fittest season.

It comes to thy hand, Reader, in a day of straits and fears, a dark and gloomy season, when the nations about us are made drunk with their own blood, and filled with the wine of astonishment; in a day when the cup is ready to pass unto us, and a storm seems to be rising in the fears of many, and threatening the Protestant interest in these reformed nations. Some men very eminent for piety and learning, from that scripture, Rev. xiii. 3. "The deadly wound," that is, the wound given the beast by the Reformation, "was healed," have concluded that Popery will once more overrun the reformed nations. And one of great

* The Saint Indeed.

renown in all the churches of Christ, foretelling this furious but short storm, comforts the people of God with this, that it is likely to fall heaviest upon the worshippers in the outward court, the formal professors of the times. O how much is every man now concerned to have his state and condition well cleared, and to give all diligence to make his calling and election sure !

It should both amaze and grieve a pious mind, to see how some ingenious persons can sit with unwearied patience and pleasure, racking their brains upon some dry school problem, or some nice mathematical point, whilst no reasons or persuasions can prevail with them to spend one serious hour in the search and study of their own hearts !

It was a saying of the great Cicero, " I would give all the wealth in the world that I might wholly live in my studies, and have nothing to hinder me." What a brave offer had that been, if heaven, and the clearing of a title to it, had been the subject-matter of these studies ! " Believe me," says another, " it were a sweet death to die in the study of the mathematical arts." And I should be ready to believe it too, did I not know that eternal judgment immediately follows death ; and that they who stand at the door of eternity have higher matters to mind than mathematical niceties. To discern the harmonies and proportions in nature is pleasant ; but to discern the harmony and proportion of the signs of grace laid down in the word, with the works of grace wrought in our souls, is a far more pleasant and necessary employment ; and to be extinguished in such a work as this were a lovely death indeed. " Blessed is that ser-

vant, whom his Lord, when he cometh, shall find so doing !”

My friends, a day of trouble is near, a dying hour approaches us ; and, when our eye-strings and heart-strings are breaking, when we are taking the last grasp of Christ and the promises, you will then know to what purpose those hours spent in such a work as this were. Search yourselves, yea, search yourselves, before the decree bring forth, as that text may be read, Zeph. ii. 1, 2. “ Enter into thy chamber, and shut thy door ;” sit close to this employment thou art here directed to : and however times shall govern, whether it be fair or foul weather abroad, thou shalt never repent such an expense of thy time. “ I am never better,” said a devout soul, “ than when I am at my book, or on my knees.”

This may seem but a dull melancholy life to the brisk and airy spirits of these times ; but let us be content with it as it is, and leave them, if we cannot have their company, to their sportiveness and frolics, never once grudging them in their short and dear-bought pleasures. Assurance that sin is pardoned and Christ is ours, with the unspeakable joys that are inseparably connected therewith, is that “ white stone, and new name, which none knoweth but he that receiveth it ;” for no words can possibly explain to another what the soul tastes and feels in such an hour as this. And be not discouraged at the difficulty of obtaining it. This white stone is no philosopher’s stone, which no man could ever say he had in his hand ; for many a Christian has really found it in waiting upon the Lord by prayer, and diligently searching the Scriptures and his own heart.

Reader, the time will come when they who scoff at the serious diligence of the saints, and break many a pleasant jest upon the most solemn and awful things in religion, will tremble when they hear the midnight cry, “Behold, the bridegroom cometh !” and see the lamps of all vain and formal professors expire, and none admitted to the marriage but such whose lamps are furnished with oil, whose professions and duties are enlivened and maintained by vital springs and principles of real grace within them.

It is a very remarkable story which Melchior Adams records in the life of Gobelinus. He says, that a little before his time there was a play exhibited at Isenach in Germany, of the wise and foolish virgins, wherein the Virgin Mary was one of the five saints that represented the wise virgins. She was brought in with the rest, telling the foolish virgins, who cried to her for oil, that it was too late ; and then others representing the foolish virgins, began to weep and make most bitter lamentations. At this Prince Frederic, who was one of the spectators, greatly amazed, cried out, “What is our faith worth, and to what purpose are all our good works, if neither Mary nor any other saint can help us ?” And such was his consternation, that it threw him into a sore and violent disease, which ended in an apoplexy, whereof he died about four days after. If the representation of these things in a play ended the life of so great a man so tragically, O think with thyself, reader, what will the effects of the Lord’s real appearance in the clouds of heaven, and the mourning and wailing of the tribes of the earth in that day be ! Think, I say, and think again and again, what the

dismal effects of such a sight and sound will be upon all who neglect serious preparation themselves, and scoff at them who do prepare to meet the Lord !

The design of this manual is to bring every man's gold to the touchstone and fire, I mean every man's grace to the trial of the word ; that thereby we may know what we are, what we have, and what we must expect and trust to at the Lord's coming. I pretend not to any gift of discerning of spirits : such an extraordinary gift there once was in the church, and it was very necessary for those times, wherein Satan was so busy and the canon of Scripture not completed ; and some are of opinion, that by virtue of this gift Peter discerned the hypocrisy of Ananias and Sapphira. But whatever that gift was, it is utterly ceased now ; no man can pretend to it. But the ordinary aids and assistances of the Spirit are with us still, and the lively oracles are among us still : to them we may freely go for the resolving of all doubts, and the decision of perplexed cases. And thus we may discern our own spirits, though we want the extraordinary gift of discerning other men's spirits.

I have little to say of this Treatise, more than that it is well aimed and designed, however it be managed. The ear tries words, as the mouth tastes meat. These things will relish according to the palates they meet with. It is not the pleasing, but the profiting of men, that I have herein laboured for. I know nothing in it that is likely to wound the upright, or slightly heal the hypocrite, by crying, " Peace, peace, when there is no peace." Scripture light has been my *cynosura* ; and, with that thread in my hand, I have followed the search of hypocrisy through the

labyrinths of the heart. Some assistance I hope I have had also from experience; for Scripture and experience are such relative things, and the tie betwixt them so discernible, that nothing in nature can be more so. What we feel in our hearts, we might have read in the Scriptures before we felt it.

That the blessing of God may go forth with it, and accompany it to thy soul, reader, is the heart's desire and prayer of,

Thine and the Church's

Servant in Christ,

JOHN FLAVEL.

THE TOUCHSTONE OF SINCERITY.

REVELATION iii. 17, 18.

“ Because thou sayest, I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing; and knowest not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked : I counsel thee to buy of me gold tried in the fire, that thou mayest be rich ; and white raiment, that thou mayest be clothed, and that the shame of thy nakedness do not appear ; and anoint thine eyes with eye-salve, that thou mayest see.”

CHAPTER I.

The text opened, and the doctrines propounded.

ALTHOUGH the Revelation of St. John is a compendium of intricate visions and obscure prophecies, containing almost as many mysteries as words, yet that cloud overshadows the prophetical part only, which begins where this chapter, with the doctrinal part, ends. Here the waters are found no deeper than in other places of the Scripture ; but if we go a little farther, they become an overflowing flood. Hitherto we touch ground, but a step farther carries us into the depths, which are above the heads of the tallest Christians. Here the Spirit speaks doctrin-

ally and perspicuously; but in the following chapters mystically and in great obscurity.

Seven epistles are found in this doctrinal part, immediately dictated from heaven, and sent by John to the seven churches of Asia, to instruct, correct, encourage, and confirm them, as their several cases required.

My text falls in the last epistle sent to the church of Laodicea, the worst and most degenerate of all the rest. The best had their defects and infirmities, but this laboured under the most dangerous disease of all. The fairest face of the seven had some spots, but a dangerous disease seems to have invaded the very heart of this. Not that all were equally guilty, but the greatest part, from which the whole is denominated, were lukewarm professors; men who had a name to live, but were dead; who, being never thoroughly engaged in religion, easily embraced that principle of the Gnostics, which made it a matter of indifferency to own or deny Christ in times of persecution, the most saving doctrine that some professors are acquainted with. This lukewarm temper Christ hated: he was sick of them, and loathed their indifferency: "I wish," says he, ver. 16. "thou wert either cold or hot;" an expression of the same meaning with that in 1 Kings xviii. 21. "How long halt ye between two opinions?" and is manifestly translated from the qualities of water, which is either cold, or hot, or lukewarm, a middle temper betwixt both, and more nauseous to the stomach than either of the former. *Cold* is the complexion and natural temper of those who are wholly alienated and estranged from Christ and religion; *hot* is the gracious temper of

those who know and love Jesus Christ in an excellent degree ; *lukewarm* is the temper of those who have too much religion to be esteemed carnal, and too little to be truly spiritual ; a generation that is too politic to venture much, and yet so foolish as to lose all ; they are loath to forsake truth wholly, and more loath to follow it too closely : the form of religion they affect as an honour, the power of it they judge a burden.

This is that temper which the Lord hates ; and this was the disease of Laodicea, which Christ, the great and only heart-anatomist and soul physician, discovers in ver. 17. and prescribes a cure for it in ver. 18. : so that the words resolve themselves into two parts : 1. A faithful discovery, and, 2. A proper remedy of the disease of Laodicea.

I. Their disease is faithfully discovered to them, both in its symptoms, cause, and aggravations.

1. Its symptoms ; an unconcerned, indifferent, regardless spirit, in matters of religion, neither hot nor cold : the true temper of formal professors, who never engage themselves thoroughly and heartily in the ways of God, but can take or leave as times govern, and worldly interest comes to be concerned.

2. Its cause and root ; which is the defect and want of the truth, and power of inward grace, noted in these expressions—“ Thou art wretched and miserable, poor, blind, and naked ;” thou are destitute of a real principle, a solid work of grace. These five epithets do all point at one and the same thing, the defectiveness and rottenness of their foundation. The two first, “ wretched and miserable,” are more general, concluding them in a sad condition, a very

sinful and lamentable estate ; the three last, “ poor, blind, and naked,” are more particular, pointing at those grand defects and flaws in the foundation, which made their condition so wretched and miserable.

“ Poor ;” that is, void of righteousness and true holiness before God. These are the true riches of Christians ; and whosoever wants them is poor and miserable, how rich soever he be in gifts of the mind, or treasures of the earth.

“ Blind ;” without spiritual illumination, and so neither knowing their disease nor their remedy, the evil of sin, nor the necessity of Christ.

“ Naked ;” without Christ and his righteousness. Sin is the soul’s shame and nakedness ; Christ’s pure and perfect righteousness is its covering or garment : this they wanted, how richly soever their bodies were adorned. These were Laodiceans ; that is, a just or righteous people, according to the meaning of that word ; whose garments, with which they covered themselves, were made of the home-spun thread of their own righteousness.

3. The disease of Laodicea is here opened to them in its aggravations : “ Thou saidst, I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing ; but knowest not that thou art wretched,” &c. To be really graceless and Christless, is a miserable condition ; but to be so, and yet confidently persuaded of the contrary, is most miserable. To have the very symptoms of death upon us, and yet to tell those who pity us, that we are as well as they, is lamentable indeed. O the power of a spiritual delusion ! This was their disease, gracelessness ; and the aggravation of it was, their senselessness.

II. We have a proper remedy prescribed: "I counsel thee to buy of me gold tried in the fire, that thou mayest be rich; and white raiment, that thou mayest be clothed, and that the shame of thy nakedness do not appear; and anoint thine eyes with eye-salve, that thou mayest see." In which we have to consider, 1. What is prescribed for the cure. 2. Where it is to be had. 3. How it is to be obtained.

1. What are the remedies prescribed? They are three; gold, white raiment, and eye-salve. First, "gold," the cure of poverty, yea, "gold tried in the fire;" that is, grace which has been variously proved already; and the more it is proved, the more its truth will be conspicuous. The next is "white raiment," the remedy against nakedness. And, lastly, "eye-salve," the effectual cure of blindness. Under all these choice metaphors, more choice and excellent things are shadowed, even spiritual graces, real holiness, more precious than gold. Christ's imputed righteousness, the richest garment in all the wardrobe of heaven; and spiritual illumination, the most excellent eye-salve that ever was, or can be applied to the mental eye or understanding of man in this world.

2. Where may these precious remedies be had? You find Christ has the monopoly of them all. "Buy of me," says Christ in the text. He is the repository of all graces. Angels, ministers, ordinances, cannot furnish you with them without Christ.

3. How they may be obtained from him: "Buy of me." On this place Estius and others build their doctrine of merit; which is to build a superstructure of hay and stubble upon a foundation of gold. The

exigence of the very text itself destroys such conceits: for what have they that are poor, wretched, miserable, and in want of all things, to give as a price, or by way of merit, for those inestimable treasures of grace? Buying, therefore, in this place, can signify or intend no more than the acquisition, compassing, or obtaining these things from Jesus Christ, in the use of such means and methods as he has appointed; and in the use of them we merit grace no more than the patient merits of his physician by coming to him, and carefully following his prescriptions in the use of such medicines as he freely gives them. And that place, Isa. lv. 1. from which this phrase seems to be borrowed, fully clears it: “He that hath no money, let him come and buy wine and milk without money, and without price.”

From all which, these three observations fairly offer themselves to us:—

DOCTRINE I. *That many professors of religion are under very great and dangerous mistakes in their profession.*

DOCTRINE II. *That true grace is exceedingly precious, and greatly enriches the soul that possesses it.*

DOCTRINE III. *That only is to be accounted true grace, which is able to endure all those trials appointed or permitted for the discovery of it.*

The first doctrine naturally arises out of the scope of the text, which is to awaken and convince unsound professors. The second, from the use which the Holy Ghost makes of the best and choicest things in nature, to shadow forth the inestimable worth and

preciousness of grace. And the third, from that particular and most significant metaphor of gold tried in the fire; by which I here understand a real and solid work of grace, evidencing itself to be so in all the proofs and trials that are made of it: for whatsoever tries grace, and puts its soundness and sincerity to the test, is that to it which fire is to gold. In this sense it is used in Scripture: "Thou hast tried us as silver is tried;" and, "I will bring the third part through the fire, and will refine them as silver is refined, and will try them as gold is tried." So that, whatsoever it is which examines and tries grace whether it be sound and sincere, that is the fire Christ here speaks of; and such grace as abides these trials, is the gold here intended.



CHAPTER II.

DOCTRINE I.—*Many professors of Religion are under very great and dangerous Mistakes in their profession.*

SECT. I.—All flattery is dangerous; self-flattery is more dangerous: but self-flattery in the business of salvation is the most dangerous of all.

To pretend to the good we know we have not, is gross hypocrisy; to persuade ourselves of the good we have not, though we think we have it, is formal hypocrisy: and this was the case of those self-deceivers in the text.

My design in this discourse is not to shake the

well-built hopes of any man, or to beget groundless jealousies, but to discover the real dangerous flaws in the foundation of many men's hopes of heaven. Every thing is as its foundation is; and that failing, all fails.

There is a twofold self-suspicion or fear in God's own people. The one is a fear of caution, awakening the soul to the use of all the preventive means for avoiding danger: this is laudable. The other is a groundless suspicion of reigning hypocrisy, tending only to despondency: this is culpable. By the former the soul is guarded against danger; by the latter it is betrayed into needless trouble, and debarred from peace.

Good men have sometimes more fear than they ought, and wicked men have less than they ought. The former sometimes shut their eyes against the fair evidences of their own graces; the latter shut their eyes against the sad evidences of their sin and misery. This is an evil in both, but not equally dangerous: for he who shuts his eyes against his own graces and privileges, loses but his peace and comfort for a time; but he who shuts his eyes against the evidences of his sin and misery, loses his precious soul to all eternity. Of this latter sort of self-deceivers the world is full; and these are the men I am now concerned with.

O that some men had less trouble! and O that some had more! If the foolish virgins had been less confident, they had certainly been more safe. If those glorious professors in Matt. vii. 22. had not shut their eyes against their own hypocrisy, Christ would not have shut against them the door of salvation and glory. Ananias and Sapphira, Hymeneus

and Philetus, Alexander and Demas, with multitudes more of that sort, are sad instances and proofs of this point. It is said in Prov. xxx. 12. that “there is a generation that is pure in their own eyes, and yet is not washed from their filthiness.” Through what false spectacles do the men of that generation look upon their own souls! The men of that generation are multiplied in this generation. Never was any age overrun with such a generation of vain, self-deluding, formal professors, as this generation is.

Three things I shall here endeavour to do:—To give evidence beyond contradiction to this sad truth, that among professors are found many self-deceivers—to assign the true causes and reasons why it is so—and then improve the matter by those practical inferences which the point affords.

SECT. II.—That there are multitudes of self-deceivers among professors, will appear,

1. By this, that there are every where to be found more professors than converts—unregenerate professors, whose religion is but the effect of education. Christianity, by the favour of an early providence, was the first comer; it first bespoke them for itself. These are Christians of a human creation, rather born than new-born believers. Now, all these are self-deceived, and hasting to damnation, under the efficacy of a strong delusion; “for if a man think himself to be something when he is nothing, he deceiveth himself,” says the apostle. Surely our birth-privilege without the new birth is nothing, yea, worse than nothing, as to our last and great account. That which stands for a great sum in our arithmetic is nothing; it is but a cipher in God’s. “Except a man

be born again," say the lips of truth, "he cannot see the kingdom of God." Poor self-deceivers! ponder these words of Christ. You have hitherto thought your moral education, your dead and heartless duties, enough to denominate you Christians before God: but go now, and learn what that scripture means; and be assured that you must experience another manner of conversion, or else it is impossible for you to escape eternal damnation.

2. It is too manifest by this, that many professors are acquainted with the externals of religion only; and that all their duties are no more than a compliance of the outward man with the commands of God. This is the superficial religion which deceives and betrays multitudes into eternal misery. True religion seats itself in the inward man, and acts effectually upon the vital powers, killing sin in the heart, and purging its designs and delights from carnality and selfishness; engaging the heart for God, and setting it as a bow in its full bent for him, in the approaches we make to him. But how little are many professors acquainted with these things! Alas! if this be all we have to stand upon, how dangerous a station is it! What is external conformity but an artificial imitation of that which lives only in the souls of good men? Thus was Jehu deceived: he did many acts of external obedience to God's command; "but Jehu took no heed to walk in the ways of the Lord God of Israel with all his heart." And this was his overthrow. This was also the ruin of those formalists in Ezek. xxxiii. 31. They came and sat before the Lord as his people; the word was to them as a lovely song; they were mightily charmed with the modula-

tion of the prophet's voice, and his lively gestures; but all the while their hearts went after their covetousness. And what abundance of such pharisaical, superficial religion, is every where to be found!

3. It appears by this, that every trial made by sufferings upon professors, blows away multitudes, like dry leaves in autumn blown away by a stormy wind. Many fall from their own steadfastness in shaking times. Prosperity multiplies vain professors, and adversity purges the church of them. "Then shall many be offended." This the Scripture every where marks as a symptom of hypocrisy: "A generation that set not their hearts aright, and whose spirit was not steadfast with God." "But they went out, that they might be made manifest that they were not of us." "For when tribulation or persecution ariseth because of the word, by and by he is offended." But should any one have told them, in the days of their first profession, that all their zeal and labour in religion would have ended in this, it is likely that they would have replied, as Hazeal did to the man of God, "But what! is thy servant a dog, that he should do this great thing?" O how unlike is their dark and dirty evening to their glorious and hopeful morning! These professors have more of the moon than of the sun; little light, less heat, but many changes. They deceive many, yea, they deceive themselves, but they cannot deceive God. During the calm what a flourish do they make, and with what gallantry do they sail! By and by you may hear tempests, and soon after you may see dreadful shipwrecks after a furious storm; and no wonder, for they wanted that ballast and establishment in them-

selves that would have kept them tight and stable, 1 Peter iii. 17.

4. It is too apparent by this, that many professors secretly indulge and shelter beloved lusts under the wings of their profession. This, like a worm at the root, will wither and kill them at last, how fragrant soever they may seem to be for a season. Gideon had seventy sons, and one bastard; but that one bastard was the death of all his seventy sons. Some men have many excellent gifts, and perform multitudes of duties; but one secret sin indulged and allowed will destroy them all at last. He who is partial as to the mortification of his sins, is undoubtedly hypocritical in his profession. If David's evidence was good for his integrity, surely such professors will never clear themselves of hypocrisy. "I was also upright before him, and kept myself from mine iniquity." This is the right eye and right hand which every sincere Christian must pluck out, and cut off. And this is a metaphor from surgeons, whose manner it is, when the whole is in danger by any part, to cut it off, lest all perish. Their suppressing some lust raises their confidence; the indulging of one destroys the foundation of their hopes: and thus they deceive themselves.

5. This also manifests the self-deceit of many professors, that the secret duties of religion, or at least the secret intercourse of the soul with God in them, is a secret hid from their knowledge and experience.

To attend the ordinances of God in the seasons of them, they know; to pray in their families at the stated hours thereof, they know; but to retire from all the world into their closets, and there to pour out

their hearts before the Lord, they know not. To feel somewhat within, paining them like an empty hungry stomach, until they have eaten that hidden manna, that bread in secret; until they have refreshed their souls with real communion with the Lord there: this is a mystery locked up from the acquaintance of many who call themselves real Christians; and yet this is made a characteristic mark of a sincere Christian by Christ himself, in Matt. vi. 6.

O reader! if thy heart were right with God, and thou didst not cheat thyself with a vain profession, thou wouldst have frequent business with God, which thou wouldst be loath thy dearest friend, or the wife of thy bosom should be privy to. Religion does not lay all open to the eyes of men. Observed duties maintain our credit, but secret duties maintain our life. It was the saying of a heathen about his secret correspondence with his friends, "What need has the world to be acquainted with it? Thou and I are theatre enough to each other." There are secret pleasures in religion, which none but renewed souls feelingly understand.

6. How many more profess religion in these days, than ever made religion their business! Philosophy tells us that there is a main-business and a by-business: the same is found in religion also.

There are who "give themselves to the Lord;" whose conversation or trade is in heaven; the end or scope of whose life is Christ; who give religion the precedency both in time and affection; who are constant and indefatigable in the work of the Lord. And there are those also, who take up religion rather for ostentation than for an occupation; who never

mind the duties of religion, but when they have nothing else to do ; and even when their outward man is engaged in the duties of it, their heart is not in it : they hear, they pray, but their souls, their thoughts and minds are abroad. It is not their business to have fellowship with God in duties, to get their lusts mortified, their hearts tried, their souls conformed to the image of God in holiness. They pray as if they prayed not, and hear as if they heard not. And if they feel no power in ordinances, no quickening in duties, it is no disappointment at all to them ; for these were not their designs in drawing nigh to God in these appointments.

SECT. III.—And if we seriously inquire into the grounds and causes of this self-deceit among professors, we shall find these four things conspiring to delude and cheat them in the great concern of salvation :—

1. The natural deceitfulness of the heart, than which nothing is more treacherous and false : “ The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked ;” that is, the heart is the greatest supplanter, the most crafty and subtle cheat of all ; it deceives us, as Jacob did his brother, to whose name this text seems to allude. It defeats us of our heavenly heritage, as Jacob supplanted him in his earthly one, while we are gone hunting after earthly trifles. And wherein its deceitfulness principally appears, you may see by the solemn caution of the apostle in James i. 22. wherein he warns us to beware, that in hearing the word we deceive not ourselves by false reasonings, for so the original words import ; they may be strictly rendered “ false reasoning themselves,” by

making false syllogisms, whereby they misconclude about their spiritual and eternal estate and condition, and befool themselves.

The time will come when a man's own heart will be found to have the chief hand in his ruin; and what Apollodorus did but fancy his heart said to him, some men's hearts will tell them in earnest, when they come to the place of misery and torment: "I have been the cause of all these." I have betrayed thee into all these torments. It was my laziness, my credulity, my averseness to the ways of strict godliness, mortification, and self-denial, which have for ever undone thee. When thou satest under the convincing truths of the gospel, it was I that whispered those atheistical surmises into thine ear, persuading thee that all thou heardest was but the intemperate heat of a hot-brained zealot. When the judgments of God were denounced, and the misery thou now feelest forewarned and threatened, it was I that whispered what the tongue of another once spake out, I will believe it when I come thither.

Surely this is a great truth which was observed by the wisest of men, "He that trusteth in his own heart, is a fool." And thousands of such fools are to be found among professors.

2. Satan is a chief conspirator in this treacherous design: "We are not ignorant," says the apostle, "of his devices," his sophistry and slights, his trains and methods of temptation, which are thoroughly studied and artificially moulded and ordered; even such systems as tutors and professors of arts and sciences have, and read over to their auditors, one judiciously observes to be the import of that text in Ephesians

vi. 11. Nor is it to be wondered at, considering his vast knowledge, deep malice, and long experience in this art of cheating, together with the great corruption and proneness of the hearts of men to close with his devices and believe his impostures, that so vast a number of souls are taken “captive by him at his will.”

It is “the god of this world that blinds the minds of them that believe not ;” “the god of this world,” who leads a world of poor deluded wretches to destruction, having first blinded their minds, that is, deluded, and with his hellish art practised upon, their understanding, that leading and directive faculty which is to the soul what eyes are to the body.

I remember Basil brings in Satan thus insulting Christ : “I have them ! I have them ! For all thy blood and miracles, thy wooings and beseechings, thy knockings and strivings, I have cozened thee of them at the very gates of heaven. For all their illuminations and tasting of the powers of the world to come, I have shipwrecked them in the very mouth of the haven.”

3. The common works found in unregenerate souls deceive many, who cannot distinguish them from the special works of the Spirit in God’s elect. See that startling scripture, Heb. vi. 4. where you find among the common operations of the Spirit upon apostates, that illumination which gives perspicuity to their minds in discerning spiritual truths, and that frequently with more distinctness and depth of judgment than some gracious souls attain unto ; besides, it is the matter out of which many rare and excellent gifts are formed in admirable variety, gifts which

are singularly useful to others, as they are exercised in expounding the Scriptures, defending the truths of Christ by solid arguments, preaching, praying, &c. and make the subject of them renowned and honoured in the church of God, whilst in the meantime he is dazzled with his own splendour, and fatally ruined by them.

There you will find also tasting as well as enlightening: so that they seem to abound not only in knowledge, but in sense also, in some kind of experience of what they know; for experience is the bringing of things to the test of spiritual sense. They taste, or experience, the good that comes by the promises of the word and discoveries of heaven and glory, though they feel not experimentally the transforming efficacy of these things upon their own souls.

Now, that illumination furnishing them with excellent gifts,—enabling them to assent to gospel-truth, which the Scripture calls faith, Acts viii. 12.; and working in them conviction of sin, 1 Sam. xv. 24.; reformation of life, 2 Peter ii. 20.; and touching their affections also with transient joy in the discovery of these truths; and this taste, which comes so near to the experience which the sanctified soul enjoys—all these things seem to put their condition beyond all controversy, and to lay a foundation for their ill-built confidence. Nothing is more apt to beget and nourish such a confidence, than the meltings and workings of our affections about spiritual things; for such a man seems to have all that is required of a Christian, and to have attained the very end of all knowledge, which is operation and influence upon the affections. When they find heat in their affec-

tions, as well as light in their minds, how apt are they to say, as these self-deceivers in the text did, they “are rich, and have need of nothing!” Now, of all the false signs of grace by which men cozen themselves, none are so dangerous and destructive to souls as those that come nearest true ones. Never does Satan more effectually and securely manage his cheats, than when he is transformed into an angel of light.

Among this sort of self-deceivers, how many gifted men, and among them some employed in the office of the ministry, will be found, whose daily employment being about spiritual things, studying, preaching, praying, conclude themselves sanctified persons, because they are conversant about sacred employments; as if the subject must be holy because the object is sacred! O that such would seriously ponder these two scriptures! “Many will say unto me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name; and in thy name have cast out devils; and in thy name done many wonderful things?” “Lest that, by any means, when I have preached unto others, I myself should be a cast-away.”

4. To add no more, this strengthens self-deceit exceedingly in many—their comparing themselves with others. Thus the Pharisees, those gross self-deceivers, “trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and despised others.” Their low estimation of others gave them that high value of themselves: and thus the proverb is made good, “He who has but one eye is a king among the blind.” Thus the false apostles cheated and befooled themselves: “But they measuring themselves by them-

selves, and comparing themselves among themselves, are not wise." God has not made one man a measure or standard to another man, but his word is the common beam or scale to try all men.

These men are as sharp-sighted to note other men's evils, as they are to mark their own excellencies; to eye the miscarriages of others with derision, and their own performances with admiration. They bless themselves when they behold the profane in their impieties: "God, I thank thee that I am not as other men are, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this publican." O what a saint am I, in comparison with these miscreants! The Pharisee's religion, you see, runs all upon *nots*; a negative holiness is enough for him: and the measure he takes of it, is by comparison of himself with others more externally vile than himself. A Christian may say, with praise and humility, I am not as some men are; but though he knows nothing by himself, yet is he not thereby justified. He neither rakes together the enormities of the vilest, nor the infirmities of the holiest, to justify and applaud himself, as these self-deceivers do.

And these are the causes and occasions of that general deception, under which so great a part of the professing world bow down and perish.

SECT. IV.—In the last place, I shall improve this point variously, according to the importance and usefulness of it, with as much brevity and closeness of application as I can. And the first use shall be a caution to professors. Before I tell you what use you should make of it, I must tell you what use you may not make of it.

1. Do not make this use of it, to conclude, from what has been said, that all professors are but hypocrites, and that there is no truth nor integrity in any man. This is both intolerable arrogance to ascend the throne of God, and unparalleled uncharitableness to judge the hearts of all men.

Some men are as apt to conclude others to be hypocrites, by measuring their hearts by their own, as others are to conclude themselves saints, by comparing their own excellencies with other men's corruptions; but, blessed be God! there is some grain among the heap of chaff, some true diamonds among the counterfeit stones. The devil has not the whole piece; a remnant, according to election, belongs really to the Lord.

2. Do not make this use of it, to suppose that assurance must be impossible, because so many professors are found to be self-deceivers. That assurance is one of the great difficulties in religion, is a truth; but that it is therefore unattainable in this world, is very false. Popish doctrine, indeed, makes it impossible; but that doctrine is practically confuted, in the comfortable experience of many souls. All are commanded to strive for it: "Give all diligence to make your calling and election sure." And some have the happiness to obtain it: "For I know whom I have believed; and am persuaded, that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him against that day."

Let the similar works upon hypocrites, resemble as much as they will the saving works of the Spirit upon believers, yet God does always, and saints do sometimes plainly discern the difference.

3. Do not make this use of it, to conceal or hide the truths or graces of God, or to refuse to profess or confess them before men, because many professors deceive themselves, and others also, by a vain profession. Because another professes what he has not, must you therefore hide or deny what you have? It is true, the possession of grace and truth in your own souls, is that which saves you; but the profession, or confession of it, is that which honours God and edifies; yea, sometimes is the instrument to save others. It is your comfort that you feel it; it is the comfort of others to know that you do so. Ostentation is your sin; but a serious and humble profession is your duty, Rom. x. 9.

SECT. V.—Having shown you, in the former section, what use you ought not to make of this doctrine, I will next show you what use you ought to make of it. And surely you cannot improve this point to a better purpose, than from it to take warning, and look to yourselves, that you be not of that number who deceive themselves in their profession. If this be so, suffer me closely to press that great apostolical caution, “Let him that thinketh he standeth, take heed lest he fall.” O professors! look carefully to your foundation: “Be not high-minded, but fear.” You have, it may be, done and suffered many things in and for religion: you have excellent gifts and sweet comforts; a warm zeal for God, and high confidence of your integrity: all this may be right, but yet it is possible it may be false also. You have sometimes judged yourselves, and pronounced yourselves upright, but remember your final sentence is not yet pronounced by your Judge; and

what if God weigh you over again in his more equal balance, and should say, "Mene, Tekel; thou art weighed in the balance, and art found wanting?" What a confounded man wilt thou be under such a sentence! "Things that are highly esteemed among men, are an abomination in the sight of God." "The Lord seeth not as man seeth."

Thy heart may be false, and thou not know it; yea, it may be false, and thou strongly confident of its integrity. The saints may approve thee, and God condemn thee: "Thou hast a name that thou livest, but thou art dead." Men may say, There is a true Nathaniel; and God may say, There is a self-deluded Pharisee.

Reader, thou hast heard of Judas and Demas, of Ananias and Sapphira, of Hymeneus and Philetus, once renowned and famous professors; and thou hast heard what they proved at last. Take heed that their case be not thine own. Do they not all, as it were with one mouth, cry to thee, O professor, if thou wilt not come where we are, do not delude thyself as we did? If thou expectest a better place and lot, be sure that thou get a sincere heart. Had we been more self-suspicious, we had been more safe.

I would not alarm you with needless jealousies, but I would fain prevent fatal mistakes. Do not you find your hearts deceitful in many things? Do not you shuffle over secret duties? Do not you censure the same evils in others, that you scarcely reprove in yourselves? Are there not many by-ends in duties? Do not you find you are far less affected with a great deal of service and honour done to God by others, than with a little by yourselves? Is

it not hard to look upon other men's excellencies without envy, or upon your own without pride? And are you not troubled with a busy devil, as well as with a bad heart? Has not he that circuits the whole world observed you? Has he not studied your constitutional sins, and found out that sin which most easily besets you? Has he less malice against your souls than others? Surely you are in the very thicket of temptations; thousands of snares are round about you. O with what difficulty are the righteous saved! How hard is it to be upright! How few even of the professing world win heaven at last! O therefore search your hearts, professors, and let this caution go down to your very reins: "Let him that thinketh he standeth, take heed lest he fall."

Away with rash uncharitable censures of others, and be more just and severe in censuring yourselves. Away with dry and unprofitable controversies, and spend your thoughts upon this great question, Am I sound, or am I rotten at heart? Am I a new creature, or the old creature still in a new creature's dress and habit? Beg the Lord that you be not deceived in that great point, whatever you may be mistaken in. Pray that you be not given up to a heedless, careless, and vain spirit, and then have religious duties for a rattle, to still and quiet your consciences.

Surely that ground-work can never be laid too sure, upon which so great a stress as thy soul and eternity must depend. It will not repent thee, when thou comest to die, that thou hast employed thy time and strength to this end. Whilst others are panting after the dust of the earth, and saying, "Who will show us any good?" be thou panting after the assur-

ance of the love of God, and crying, Who will show me how to make my calling and election sure?

O deceive not yourselves with names and notions. Think not, because you are for a stricter way of worship, or because you associate with and are accordingly denominated one of the more reformed professors, that therefore you are safe enough. Alas, how small an interest have titles, modes, and denominations in religion ! Suppose a curious artist takes a lump of lead, and refines it, and casts it into the mould, whence it comes forth shining and bearing some noble figure ; suppose that of an eagle, yet it is but a leaden eagle. Suppose it is the figure of a man, and that in the most exact lineaments and proportions, yet still it is but a leaden man. Nay, let it bear the figure of an angel, it is but a leaden angel ; for the base and ignoble matter is the same as it was, though the figure be not. Even so take an unregenerate, carnal man ; let his life be reformed, and his tongue refined, and call him a zealous Conformist or a strict Non-conformist ; call him a Presbyterian, an Independent ; or what you will : he is all the while but a carnal Conformist or Non-conformist, an unregenerate Presbyterian, a carnal Independent ; for his nature is still the same, though the stamp and figure his profession gives him be not the same.

O my friends, believe it, fine names and words are of little value with God. God will no more spare you for these, than Samuel did Agag for his delicate ornaments and spruce appearance. Either make sure of the root of the matter, or the leaves of a vain profession will not long cover you.

To be deceived by another is bad enough ; but to

deceive ourselves is a thousand times worse. To deceive ourselves in truths of the superstructure, is bad; and they that do so shall suffer loss, 1 Cor. iii. 12.; but to deceive ourselves in the foundation, is a desperate deceit, and shipwrecks all our hopes and happiness at once.

If any one lose his money by a cheat, it troubles him; but to lose his soul by a cheat will confound him. If a man lose an eye, an ear, a hand, a foot, yet, as Chrysostom says, God has given these members double, so that there is another left: but the soul is one, and only one; and if that be damned, you have not another to be saved. O therefore be restless till it be, and till you know it be, out of eternal danger.

SECT. VI.—If so many professors of religion be cheated in their profession, let all that are well satisfied and assured of their integrity bless the Lord whilst they live for that mercy. O it is a mercy that no unsanctified soul can have; yea, and it is a mercy that many gracious souls cannot obtain, though they seek it with tears, and would part with all the pleasant things they have in the world to enjoy it.

This is that mercy which gives souls the highest pleasure this world is acquainted with, or the state of this mortality can bear; for let the well-assured soul but consider what it is assured of—Christ, with the purchases of his blood. O what is this! “I am my beloved’s, and my beloved is mine,” Cant. ii. 16. What a vital, ravishing, overpowering efficacy is in that voice of faith! Let it but look back a few years, and compare what it was with what it is now. “It was far off, it is now made nigh.” “It was not

beloved, but is now beloved." "It had not obtained mercy, but now hath obtained mercy." Or let the assured soul look forward, and compare what it now is and has, with what it shortly shall be made, and put in possession of. "Beloved," says the apostle, "now are we the sons of God; but it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that when he shall appear, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is." Let the assured soul but steep its thoughts, by meditation, in these subjects, and it will be impossible to keep him from the most agreeable transports of joy and delight.

O what a life have you in comparison with other men! Some have two hells; one present, another coming: you have two heavens; one in hand, the other in hope. Some of your own brethren in Christ, who have been, it may be, many years panting after assurance, are still denied it; but God has indulged so peculiar a favour to you. Bless ye the Lord, and make his praise glorious.



CHAPTER III.

DOCTRINE II.—*True grace is exceedingly precious, and greatly enriches the soul which has it. It is Christ's gold.*

SECT. I.—The Lord Jesus here chooses the most pure, precious, resplendent, durable, and valuable thing, in all the treasures and magazines of nature, to shadow forth saving grace, which is infinitely more

excellent. Certainly that must be the best thing, which the best things in nature can but imperfectly shadow forth. What was the golden oil emptied through the two golden pipes, Zech. iv. 12. but the precious graces of God, flowing through Christ into all his members? Gold is precious, but one dram of saving grace is more precious than all the gold of Ophir. "It cannot be gotten for gold, neither shall silver be weighed for a price thereof." Surely gold and silver, sapphires, diamonds, and rubies, are not worth the mentioning, when saving grace is once mentioned.

1. For consider it in its cause and fountain from whence it flows, and you will find it to be the fruit of the Spirit; who, on that account, is called "the Spirit of Grace." It derives its original from the Most High; it is spirit born of the Spirit. All the rules of morality, all human diligence and industry can never produce one gracious habit or act: "Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think any thing as of ourselves." Nay, we speak not becoming the incomparable worth of grace, when we say that it is the fruit and birth of the Spirit; for so are common gifts also. There are several emanations from this sun, divers streams from this fountain; but of all his operations and productions, this of saving grace is the most noble and excellent. Gifts are from the Spirit as well as grace, but grace is more excellent than the best gifts: "Covet earnestly the best gifts, and yet show I unto you a more excellent way." Hence you read in Phil. i. 10. "of things that are excellent;" or, as the original might be rendered, "things that differ;" namely, in respect of

excellency, not as good and evil, but as less good and more good differ. Gifts have their value and preciousness, but the best gifts differ as much from grace as brass from gold. Gifts are dead graces, but graces are living gifts. Grace is the most excellent production of the highest and most excellent cause.

2. Consider it in its nature, and you will find it divine. St. Peter speaks of being “partakers of the divine nature,” that is, in our sanctification; not that it gives us the properties of the divine nature; they are incommunicable; but the similitude and resemblance of it is stamped upon our souls in the work of grace.

“The new man is renewed in knowledge, after the image of him that created him.” The schoolmen and some of the fathers place this image or resemblance of God, in the natural faculties of the soul—the understanding, memory, and will; which is a shadow of a trinity in unity: but it rather consists in the renovation of the faculties by grace; for in this we bear the divine image upon our souls, and that image or resemblance of God in holiness is the beauty and honour of our souls.

It is their beauty. “How fair and how pleasant art thou, O love, for delights!” says Christ of his people. Natural beauty consists in the symmetry and comely proportion of parts, each with the other; spiritual beauty, in the harmony or agreeableness of our souls to God. And as it is our chief beauty, so certainly it is our highest honour; for it gives us access unto God, who is the fountain of honour and glory; and this makes the righteous more excellent

than his neighbour: let his neighbour be what he will, though the blood of nobles run in his veins, the righteous is more exalted than he, except saving grace be also diffused in his soul.

3. Consider it in its recipient subject, and you will find its value still to increase; for the precious oil of saving grace is never poured into any other than an elect vessel. Hence faith, one branch of sanctification, is, with respect to its subject, styled “the faith of God’s elect.” Whosoever finds true grace in his soul, may, during the evidence thereof, from it strongly conclude his election, looking backward, and his salvation, looking forward. It marks and seals the person in whom it is, for glory. “God hath set apart him that is godly for himself.”

4. View the precious worth of grace in its excellent effects and influences upon the soul in which it dwells.

1st, It adorns with incomparable ornaments, which are of great price in the sight of God. Yea, it reflects such beams of glory on the soul where its seat is, that Christ himself, the author, is also the admirer of it. “Thou hast ravished my heart, my sister, my spouse! Thou hast ravished my heart with one of thine eyes, with one of the chains of thy neck!”

2d, It elevates and enobles a man’s spirit beyond all other principles in man. It sets the heart and affections upon heaven, and fixes them on the glory of the invisible world: “But our conversation is in heaven, from whence we look for the Saviour.” Whilst others are trading for corn and wine, for sheep and oxen, for feathers and trifles, the gracious

soul is trading with God for pardon and peace, for righteousness and life, for glory and immortality. “Truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ.”

3d, It not only raises the spirit by conversing with God and things above, but transforms the soul by that converse into the likeness of those heavenly objects it converses with. “It changes them into the same image.” So that though the sanctified man still remains the *who* he was, yet not the *what* he was before. The very temper of his spirit is altered.

4th, It not only transforms the soul in which it is, but preserves the subject in which it is. It is a singular preservative from sin, so that though sin be in him still, and works in him still, yet it cannot prevail in him still to fulfil the lusts of it, as it was wont to do. Sin conceives, but cannot bring forth fruit unto death.

5th, It not only preserves it from sin, but grace establishes the soul, in which it is, far beyond any other arguments without, or any other principles within a man. “It is a good thing that the heart be established with grace.” This is that which the apostle calls our own steadfastness, or the ballast which we have within ourselves, and which keeps us right and stable. O the excellency of grace!

6th, It is also the root of all that precious faith which we bring forth to God in this world. It is the root of every gracious word in our lips, and of every gracious work in our hands. Be the matter of our gracious thoughts ever so excellent, the matter of our heavenly discourses and prayers ever so sweet, still grace is the root of the matter. O then, what a precious thing is grace!

5. View it in its properties, and you will soon discover its transcendent excellencies. The richest epithets are no hyperboles here. We go not beyond the value of it, when we call it supernatural grace, for so it is; it comes down from above, from the Father of lights: nature can never be improved to that height, how much soever its admirers boast of it. Nor do we strain too high when we call it immortal grace; for so has God made it. This is that water which springs up in the sanctified soul unto eternal life. It will not die when thou diest, but ascend with the soul, from which it is inseparable, and be received up with it into glory. You may outlive friends, you may outlive gifts, but you cannot outlive your graces.

Shall I say it is the most sweet and comfortable thing that ever the soul was acquainted with in this world, next to Jesus Christ, the author and foundation of it? Surely, if so I speak, I have as many witnesses to attest it as there are gracious souls in the world. Nothing is more comfortable than grace, except Christ; and yet without grace no soul can feel the comforts of Christ in the troubles of life or in the straits of death. This is a spring of comfort.

6. Consider it in its design and scope, and you will still discern more and more of its precious excellency: for what is the aim and end of God in the infusions and improvements of grace, but to attemper and mould our spirits by it into a meetness and fitness for the enjoyment of himself in the world to come? "Giving thanks to the Father, who hath made us meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light." Compare this with 2 Cor. v. 5. "Now he

that hath wrought us for the self-same thing is God." O blessed design! How precious must that work be, which is wrought for so high and glorious a purpose as this? No work more excellent, no end more noble.

7. Consider the means and instruments, both principal and subordinate, employed in this work. Many blessed instruments are set on work to beget, preserve, and improve grace in our souls; and these all show the precious worth of it. No wise man will dig for a base and worthless metal with golden mattocks. The blood of Christ was shed to procure it, Heb. xiii. 12. The Spirit of God is sent forth to form and create it; for it is his own workmanship, Eph. ii. 10.; his fruit, Gal. v. 22. The ordinances and officers of the gospel were at first instituted, and ever since continued in the church, for this work's sake, John xvii. 17. Eph. iv. 12. It is the fruit of Christ's blood; yea, and it has cost the sweat and blood of the dispensers of the gospel too. Nay, all the works of Providence look this way, and aim at this thing, Rom. viii. 28. What is the errand of all God's rods, but to make us partakers of his holiness? Heb. xii. 10.

8. The high value that the most high God sets upon grace, shows it to be an excellent thing indeed. "It is of great price in his sight." No service finds acceptance with God, but what is performed by grace. None but sanctified vessels are meet for the Master's use. "The end of the commandment is charity out of a pure heart." The weakest performances of grace find acceptance with him, though clogged with many sinful weaknesses

and infirmities. If God so prize it, well may we. He who made the jewel, best understands the value of it.

9. The hypocritical pretences made to it all over the professing world, show what a most precious and desirable thing it is. If there were not some singular glory in it, why does every one desire to be reputed gracious? Nay, the devil himself baits many of his hooks of temptation with a show of grace; for he knows sin has no native beauty of its own to entice, and therefore he borrows the paint and pretence of holiness to cover it: but O to what a dilemma will the hypocrite be brought at last! And how can he answer it when God shall demand, If grace were evil, why didst thou affect the name and reputation of it? And if it were good, why didst thou satisfy thyself with the empty name and shadow of it only?

10. The incomparable esteem that all good men have for it, shows it to be a thing of inestimable price. Grace is the sum of all their prayers, the scope of all their endeavours, the matter of their chief joy, the reward of their afflictions and sufferings; their chief joys and sorrows, hopes and fears in this world, are taken up about it. By all which it appears, that its price is above rubies; and all the gold and silver in the world are but dung and dross in comparison with it.

SECT. II.—Six practical inferences from this precious truth.

1. Is saving grace more precious than gold? Let them who have it bless God for it, and not boast.

Men's hearts are apt to puff up and swell with spiritual, as with material gold. It is hard to be an owner of much of this gold, and not be lifted up with

it. To keep down thy heart, and preserve thine eyes from being dazzled with these thy gracious excellencies, it will be needful for thee, Christian, sometimes to consider, that, although grace be one of the most excellent things that ever God created, yet it is but a creature, a dependent thing. Yea, it is not only a creature, but a very imperfect creature yet in thy soul, labouring under many weaknesses; and sometimes ready to die. Though it can do many things for you, yet it cannot justify you before God. You cannot make a garment of it to cover your guilt, nor plead the dignity of it at God's bar for your discharge. It is not your inherent, but Christ's imputed righteousness must do that for you. Nay, remember that, how excellent soever it be, it is not the native growth and product of your hearts; all the grace you have is foreign to your natures, and what you have is received. And remember too, that he who is most proud and conceited of his own graces, will be found to be the owner of least grace, and has most cause to question whether he has any or none. It is the nature of grace to humble, abase, and empty the soul; and it is the strength of our corruptions which thus puffs us up with vain conceits.

2. Is saving grace more excellent than gold? What cause then have the poorest Christians to be well satisfied with their lot!

To others God has given Ishmael's portion, the fatness of the earth; to you, Isaac's, the graces of the covenant. Their portion is paid in brass, yours in gold. Many of you are poor in the world, but "rich in faith, and heirs of the kingdom which God hath promised." What is the dust of the earth to

the fruits of the Spirit? You are troubled that you have no more of the world; it may be if you had more gold, you would have less grace. You consider not how many are poor and wretched in both worlds, moneyless and Christless too. You do not consider, that you are nearly come to that state in which all your wants will be fully supplied, where you shall not need the treasures of the earth, but have your desires satisfied out of the treasures of grace and glory.

3. Is saving grace gold? yea, infinitely more precious than gold! Then, surely, declining Christians are great losers, and have cause to be mourners. The remission of the least degree of grace, is more to be lamented than the loss of the greatest sum of gold.

Though the habits of grace be not lost, yet the acts of grace may be suspended, 2 Sam. xii. 31.; the degrees of grace may be remitted, Rev. iii. 3.; the evidences of grace may be clouded, and consequently the comforts of grace may be suspended, Isa. l. 10.; and the least of these is such a loss, as all the treasures of the earth cannot repair. Well therefore may declining Christians challenge the first place among all the mourners in this world.

4. Is grace so invaluablely precious? How precious then ought the ordinances of God to be to us, by which grace is first communicated and afterwards improved in our souls! "The law of thy mouth is better unto me than thousands of gold and silver;" and well may it be so, whilst it imparts and improves that to which gold and silver are but dross and dung. None but those who value not grace, will ever slight

the means, or despise and injure the instruments thereof. It is a sad sign of a graceless world, when these precious things fall under contempts and slights.

5. If grace be so precious, how watchful should all gracious persons be in the days of temptation !

The design of temptation is to rob you of your treasure. When cut-purses get into the crowd, we are accustomed to say, Friends, look to your purses. How many brave Christians have we read and heard of, who have chosen to part with their lives rather than with their graces, who have “ resisted unto blood, striving against sin !” O Christians, you live in a cheating age. Many seeming Christians have lost all, and many real Christians have lost much ; so much, that they are likely to see but little comfort in this world, likely to go mourning to the grave with this lamentation, “ O that it were with me as in times past !”

6. Is there such precious worth in saving grace ? Then bless God for it, and diligently use all means to increase and improve it in your souls.

It is gold for preciousness and for usefulness, and must not be laid up in a napkin. That is a sin condemned by the very scope of that parable in Matt. xxv. 14. All Christians indeed have not the same advantages of improvement ; but all must improve it according to the advantages they have, in order to an account. Reserved Christians, who live too abstracted from the society and communion of others, and disperse not their streams abroad to the benefit of others, nor improve the graces of others for their own benefit, are wanting both to their own duty and comfort. See you a man rich in grace ? O trade

with him if you can, to improve yourselves by him ; and the rather, because you know not how soon death may snatch him from you ; and with him all his stock of grace is gone from you too, except what you made your own whilst you conversed with him. But, alas ! instead of holy, profitable, soul-improving communion, some are sullenly reserved, some are negligent and lazy, some are litigious and wrangling, more apt to draw forth the dross than the gold, the corruptions rather than the graces of others. And it is sad to consider how few there are who carry on a profitable trade for increase of grace.

And as grace is not improved by communion with men, so I fear that most Christians thrive but little in their communion with God. We are too seldom in our closets, too little upon our knees : and when we are there, we gain but little, we come not off such gainers by duty as we might. O Christians, think, when you are hearing and praying, I am now trading with heaven for that which is infinitely better than gold. God is rich to all that call upon him. What a treasure may I get this hour, if the fault be not in mine own heart !

CHAPTER IV.

DOCTRINE III.—*That only is to be accounted true grace, which is able to endure all the trials appointed or permitted for the discovery of it.*

SECT. I.—The most wise God has seen fit to set all his people in a state of trial in this world. First, he tries, and then he crowns them: “Blessed is the man that endureth temptation;” that is, probation or trial; “for when he is tried, he shall receive a crown of life.”

No man can say what he is, whether his graces are true or false, till they have been tried and examined by those things which are to them as fire is to gold. The self-deceivers in the text thought they had grace; yea, they thought they had been rich in grace: but it proved no better than dross; and, therefore, Christ here counsels them to buy of him gold tried in the fire; that is, true grace indeed, grace which will appear to be grace after the various proofs and examinations of its sincerity that are to be made in this world, as well as in the great solemn trial it must come to in the world to come.

The Scripture speaks of a twofold trial: 1. A trial of men’s opinions; and, 2. A trial of their graces.

1. The opinions and judgments of men are tried as by fire; in which sense we are to understand that passage: “Now if any man build upon this foundation, gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, stubble; every man’s work shall be made manifest: for

the day shall declare it, because it shall be revealed by fire; and the fire shall try every man's work of what sort it is." This text speaks of such persons as held the foundation of Christianity, but yet super-structed such doctrines and practices as were no more able to endure the trial, than hay, wood, or stubble can endure the fire. Such a person hereby brings himself into danger; and though the apostle will not deny the possibility, yet he asserts the difficulty of his salvation: "He shall be saved, yet so as by fire;" as a man is saved by leaping out of his house at midnight, when it is all on fire about his ears; for so that phrase imports, Amos iv. 11. and Jude 23.; glad to escape naked, and with the loss of his goods; blessing God he has his life for a prey. And just as little regard as this shall men have to their erroneous notions and unscriptural opinions at last.

2. The graces of men are brought to the test, as well as their opinions. Trial will be made of their hearts, as well as of their heads; and upon this trial the everlasting safety and happiness of the person depends. If some of a man's opinions be found hay or stubble, yet so long as he holds the Head and is right in the foundation, he may be saved; but if a man's supposed graces be found hay or stubble, all the world cannot save him. There is no way of escape, if he finally deceive himself herein. And of this trial of graces my text speaks. Sincere grace is gold tried by fire.

There is a twofold trial of grace—active and passive.

1. There is an active trial of it; in which we try it ourselves. "Examine yourselves; prove yourselves." Measure your hearts, duties, and graces, by the rule

of the word : see how they answer to that rule ; bring your hearts and the word together by solemn self-examination. Confer with your reins, and commune with your own hearts.

2. There is a passive trial of it. Whether we try it or not, God will try it. He will bring our gold to the touchstone and to the fire : “ Thou, O Lord, knowest me ; thou hast seen me, and tried mine heart towards thee,” says the prophet.

Sometimes he tries the strength and ability of his servants’ graces : and thus he tried Abraham, Heb. xi. 17. And sometimes he tries the soundness and sincerity of their graces : so the Ephesian angel was tried, and found dross, Rev. ii. 2. ; and so Job was tried, and found true gold, Job xxiii. 10. These trials are not made by God for his own information, for he knows what is in man ; his eyes pierce the heart and reins : but for our information ;—which is the true sense of Deut. viii. 2. “ Thou shalt remember all the way which the Lord thy God led thee these forty years in the wilderness, to humble thee, and to prove thee, to know what was in thy heart ;” that is, to make thee know it, by giving thee such experiments and trials of it in those straits and difficulties in the wilderness.

And these are the trials of grace I am here to speak of, not excluding the active trials made by ourselves. No ; all these trials made by God upon us, are designed to put us upon the trial of ourselves. When God tries, we should try too.

Now, the method into which I shall cast this discourse, shall be to show you, 1. What those things are which try the sincerity of our graces, as fire tries

gold. 2. For what ends God puts the graces of his people upon such trials in this world. 3. That such grace only is sincere as can endure these trials. 4. I shall apply the whole.

SECT. II.—I shall show, in the first place, what those things are which try the sincerity of grace, as fire tries gold.

Before I enter into particulars, it will be needful to acquaint you, that the subject before me is full of difficulties. There is need of much cautious respect to the various degrees of growth among Christians, and the vicissitudes of their inward cases; else we may darken and perplex the way instead of clearing it.

The portraiture of a Christian is such as none can draw to one model, but it must be drawn with a due respect to the infancy of some, as well as to the age and strength of others.

Great heed ought, also, to be taken in the application of marks and signs. We should first try them, before we try ourselves or others by them. Marks and signs are, by some, distinguished into exclusive, inclusive, and positive. Exclusive marks serve to shut out bold pretenders, by showing them how far they come short of a saving work of grace: and they are commonly taken from some necessary common duty, as hearing, praying, &c. He who has not these things, cannot have any work of grace in him; and yet if he has them, he cannot from thence conclude his state to be gracious. He who so concludes, deceives himself.

Inclusive marks discover the degrees, rather than the truth of grace; and are intended for comfort rather than conviction. If we find them in ourselves,

we find not only sincerity, but eminency of grace ; they being taken from some raised degree, and eminent acts of grace, in confirmed and grown Christians.

Betwixt these two, there is a middle sort of marks, which are called positive marks ; and they are such as are always in regenerate souls, and in them only. The hypocrite has them not ; the grown Christian has them, and that in an eminent degree ; the poorest Christian has them in a lower, but yet in a saving degree. Great care must be taken in the application of these marks. And it is past doubt, that many weak and injudicious Christians have been greatly prejudiced by finding the experiences of eminent Christians, proposed as rules to measure their sincerity by. Alas ! these no more fit their souls, than Saul's armour did David's body.

These things being premised, and a due care carried along with us through this discourse, I shall next come to the particulars, and show you what those things are which discover the state and tempers of our souls. And though it is true, that there is no condition we are in, nor providence that befalls us, but takes some proof, and makes some discovery of our hearts ; yet, to limit this discourse, and to come to particulars as soon as we can, I shall show what trials are made of our graces in this world, by our prosperity and our adversity, by our corruptions and our duties, and lastly, by our suffering upon the score and account of religion.

SECT. III.—Prosperity, success, and the increase of outward enjoyments, are to grace, what fire is to gold. Riches and honours make trial what we are ;

and by these things many a false heart has been detected, as well as the sincerity and eminency of the graces of others discovered. We may fancy the fire of prosperity to be rather for comfort than trial; to refresh us, rather than to prove us: but you will find prosperity to be a great discoverer, and that scarcely any thing proves the truth and strength of men's graces and corruptions more than that does. "To find humility with honour," says Bernard, "is to find a phoenix." Let an obscure person be lifted up to honour, and, how steady and well composed soever he was before, it is a thousand to one but his eyes will be dazzled, and his head run round, when he is upon the lofty pinnacle of praise and honour: "As the fining pot for silver, and the furnace for gold, so is a man to his praise." Put the best gold into the fining pot of praise, and it is a wonder if a great deal of dross does not appear. The vain-glory of good Hezekiah rose like froth or scum upon the pot, when heated by prosperity, Isa. xxxix. 2. It was such a fining pot to Herod, as discovered him to be dross itself, Acts xii. 23. How did that poor man swell under this trial into the conceit of his being a god, and was justly destroyed by worms, because he forgot himself to be a worm! We little think what a strange alteration an exalted state will make upon our spirits. When the prophet would abate the vain confidence of Hazael, who would not believe that ever he could be turned into such a savage beast as the prophet had foretold, he only tells him, "The Lord hath showed me, that thou shalt be king over Syria." The meaning is, Do not be too confident, Hazael, that thy temper and disposition can never alter to

that degree: thou never yet satest on a throne. When men see the crown upon thy head, then they will better see the true temper of thy heart.

How humble was Israel in the wilderness! The people were tame and tractable in a lean pasture; but bring them once into Canaan, and the world is strangely altered: then “We are lords,” say they; “we will come no more unto thee.” Prosperity is a crisis, both to grace and corruption. Hence is that caution to Israel, “When thou hast eaten, and art full, then beware lest thou forget the Lord thy God:” *then*, beware; that is the critical time. Surely that man must be acknowledged rich, very rich in grace, whose grace suffers no diminution or eclipse by his riches; and that man deserves double honour, whose pride the honours of this world cannot provoke and inflame.

It is related of a pious divine in Germany, that, being on his death-bed, and being somewhat disconsolate on reflecting upon the barrenness of his life, some friends took thence an occasion to commend him, and reminded him of his painful ministry and fruitful life among them; but he cried out, “Withdraw the fire, for I have yet chaff in me:” meaning, that he felt his ambition, like chaff, catching fire from the sparks of their praises. Like this was the saying of another, “He that praises me, wounds me.”

But, to descend to the particular discoveries that prosperity and honour make of the want of grace in some, and of the weakness of grace in others, I will show you what symptoms of hypocrisy appear in some men under the trial of prosperity, and what signs of grace appear in others under the same trial.

SECT. IV.—Prosperity discovers many sad symptoms of an ungodly heart; and, among others, these are ordinarily most conspicuous:—

1. It casts the hearts of some men into a deep oblivion of God, and makes them lay aside all care of duty. The altars of rich men seldom smoke, Deut. xxxii. 13—15. Jeshurun sucked honey out of the rock, eat the fat of lambs, and kidneys of wheat; but what was the effect of this? He kicked, and forsook God who made him, and lightly esteemed the rock of his salvation. Instead of lifting up his heart in an humble thankful acknowledgment of God's bounty, he lifted up the heel in a wanton abuse of his mercy. In the fattest earth we find the most slippery footing.

He who is truly gracious, may in prosperity remit some degrees; but a carnal heart loseth there all that in a low condition it seemed to save. Agur's deprecation, as to himself, was, no doubt, built upon his frequent observation how it was with others: "Lest I be full, and deny God."

It is said, that "the abundance of the rich will not suffer him to sleep." And I wish that were the worst injury it did him; but, alas! it will not suffer him to pray, to meditate, to give time and thought to his eternal concerns. He falls asleep in the lap of prosperity, and forgets that there is a God to be served, or a soul to be saved. O this is a dangerous symptom of a very graceless heart!

2. Prosperity meeting with a graceless heart, makes it wholly sensual, and entirely swallows up its thoughts and affections. Earthly things transform and mould such a heart into their own similitude and

nature; the whole strength of the soul goes out to these enjoyments. Thus, these graceless yet prosperous persons are described in Job xxi. 11—13. “They take the timbrel and harp, and rejoice at the sound of the organ: they spend their days in wealth.” They take the timbrel, not the Bible. “They rejoice at the sound of the organ:” not a word is said of their rejoicing in God. “They sent forth their little ones in the dance:” that is all the catechism they are taught. “They spend their days in wealth:” their whole time, that precious stock and talent, is wholly laid out on these sensitive things. Either the pleasure of it powerfully charms them, or the cares of it wholly engross their mind; so that there is no time to spare for God. “They live in pleasure upon earth,” as it is in James v. 5. just as the fish lives in the water, its proper element. Take such a man off from these things, and put him on spiritual, serious, heavenly employments, and he is a fish on the dry land.

Now, though prosperity may too much influence and ensnare the minds of good men, and estrange them too much from heavenly things, yet for worldly things thus to engross their hearts, and convert them into their own similitude and nature, so that these things should be the centre of their hearts, the very proper element in which they live, this is utterly impossible. A hypocrite indeed may be brought to this, because, though Janus like, he has two faces, yet he really has but one principle, and that is wholly carnal and earthly; so that it is easy to make all the water run into one channel, to gather all into one entire stream, in which his heart shall pour out all

his strength to the creature. But a Christian indeed has a double principle influencing him. Though he has a law of sin that moves him one way, yet there is in him also the law of grace which thwarts and crosses that principle of corruption; so that as grace cannot do what it would, because of sin, so neither can sin do what it would, because of grace, Gal. v. 17. The heart of a Christian, in the midst of ensnaring sensual enjoyments, finds indeed a corrupt principle in it, which would incline him to fall asleep on such a soft pillow, and forget God and duty; but it cannot. O no! it cannot do so. There is a principle of grace within him, that never leaves disturbing and calling upon him, till he rise and return to his God, the true rest of his soul.

3. A false pretender to religion, a hypocritical professor, meeting with prosperity and success, grows altogether unconcerned about the interest of religion, and senseless of the calamities of God's people. Thus the prophet convinces the Jews of their hypocrisy, in Amos vi. 1—6. "They were at ease in Zion, and trusted in the mountain of Samaria;" and so, having a shadow of religion and a fulness of all earthly things, they fell to feasting and sporting: "they drank wine in bowls, and anointed themselves with the chief ointments, but were not grieved for the affliction of Joseph." They condoled not over the breakings or tearing to pieces of Joseph. If they were once out of danger, let the church shift for itself; they are secure in a warm nest: let the birds of prey catch and devour that flock with which they sometimes associated, they are not touched with it. Moses could not do so, though in the greatest security

and confluence of the honours and pleasures of Egypt, Acts vii. 23. Nehemiah could not do so, though the servant and favourite of a mighty monarch, and wanting nothing to make him outwardly happy; the pleasures of a king's court could not cheer his heart, or scatter the clouds of sorrow from his countenance, whilst his brethren were in affliction, and the city of his God lay waste, Nehem. ii. 1—3. Nor indeed can any gracious heart be unconcerned and senseless; for that union which all the saints have with Christ their Head, and with one another as fellow-members in Christ, will beget sympathy among them in their sufferings, 1 Cor. xii. 26.

SECT. V.—But as the fire of prosperity discovers this and much more dross in a graceless heart, so it discovers the sincerity and grace of God's people. I say not that it discovers nothing but grace in them. O that it were so! Alas! many of them have had a great deal of dross and corruption discovered by it. But yet, in this trial, the graciousness and uprightness of their heart will appear in these and such like workings of it.

1. Under prosperity, success, and honour, the upright heart will labour to suppress pride, and keep itself lowly and humble; and still the more grace there is, the more humility there will be. If God lift him up, he will lay himself low, and exalt his God high. So did Jacob when God had raised and enlarged him: "I am not worthy of the least of all the mercies, and of all the truth which thou hast showed unto thy servant; for with my staff I passed over this Jordan, and now I am become two bands," Gen. xxxii. 10. Great was the difference in Jacob's out-

ward condition at his return, from what it was at his first passage over Jordan; then poor, now rich; then single and comfortless, now the head of a great family: yea, but though his outward estate was altered, the frame of his heart was not altered. Jacob was a holy and humble man when he went out, and so he was when he returned. He saw a multitude of mercies about him; and, among them all, not one but was greater than himself.

I dare not say every Christian under prosperity can at all times manifest like humility; but I am sure that what pride and vanity soever may rise in a gracious heart tried by prosperity, there is that within him which will check it. He dares not suffer such proud thoughts to lodge quietly in his heart; for, alas! he sees that in himself, and that in his God, which will abase him. Grace will make him look back to his original condition, and say, with David, "What am I, O Lord God, and what is my father's house, that thou hast brought me hitherto?" It will make him look within, and see the baseness of his own heart and the corruptions that are there, and wonder at the dealings of God with so vile a creature. O, thinks he, if others did but know of me what I know of myself, they would abhor me more than they now esteem and value me.

2. Prosperity usually draws forth the saints' love to the God of their mercies. That which heats a wicked man's lusts, warms a gracious man's heart with love and delight in God.

These were the words of that lovely song which David sang in the day that the Lord delivered him out of the hands of all his enemies, and from the

hand of Saul : he said, “ I will love thee, O Lord, my strength,” Psalm xviii. These outward things are not the main grounds and motives of the love of the saints to God ; no, they love him when he takes away, as well as when he gives ; but they are sanctified instruments to inflame their love to God. O in what an ardour of love did David go into the presence of God under the sense of his mercies, his melting mercies, when he thus poured out his whole soul in a stream of love to his God, 2 Sam. vii. 19, 20. “ Is this the manner of men, O Lord God ? And what can David say more unto thee ? ”—an expression that turns up the very bottom of his heart.

3. Prosperity and comfortable providences usually become cautions against sin, when they meet with a sanctified soul. This is the natural inference of a gracious soul from them—Has God pleased me ? then has he obliged me to take more care to please him. O let me not grieve him, who has comforted me ! So Ezra ix. 13. “ After such a deliverance as this, should we again break thy commandments ? ” What ! break his commandments who has broken our bonds ? God forbid ! It was an excellent resolution of a Christian, who, receiving an eminent mercy, at the same time that he felt himself under the power of a special corruption, said, “ Well, now will I go forth in the strength of this mercy, to mortify and subdue that corruption.” I will not measure every Christian by the eminent workings of grace in some one ; but surely so far I may safely go, that sincerity knows not how to sin, because grace has abounded ; any more than it dares sin, that grace may abound.

4. A truly gracious soul will not be satisfied with all the prosperity and comforts in the world for his portion. “Not thine, Lord, but thee,” is the voice of grace. When Providence had been more than ordinarily bountiful in outward things to Luther, he began to be afraid of its meaning, and earnestly protested that God should not put him off so. “The Lord is my portion, saith my soul,” Lam. iii. 24.; and the soul can best tell what it has made its choice, and whereon it has bestowed its chief delights and expectations. An unsound heart will accept worldly things for its portion. If the world be sure to him, and his designs fail not there, he can be content to leave God, and soul, and heaven, and hell, at hazard; but so cannot the upright. These things in subordination; but neither these, nor any thing under the sun, in comparison with, or opposition to God.



CHAPTER V.

The trial which adversity makes of the sincerity or unsoundness of our hearts.

SECT. I.—That adversity is a furnace to try of what metal our hearts are, none can doubt, who has either studied the Scriptures, or observed his own heart under afflictions.

When the dross and rust of hypocrisy and corruption had almost eaten out the heart of religion among the Jews, then saith God, “I will melt them,

and try them; for what shall I do for the daughter of my people?" Here affliction is the furnace, and the people are the metal cast into it, and the end of it is trial. I will melt them, and try them; what other course shall I take with them? If I let them alone, their lusts, like the rust and canker in metals, will eat them out. Prosperity multiplies professors, and adversity brings them to the test. Then hirelings quickly become changelings. The gilded potsherd glitters till it come to the scouring. The devil thought Job had been such a one, and moved that he might be tried in this way, being confident that he would be found but dross in the trial, Job i. 11.; but though the furnace of affliction discovered some dross in him, as it will in the best of men, yet he came forth as gold.

In this furnace also grace is manifested. It is said in Rev. xiii. 10. "Herein is the faith and patience of the saints;" herein is the trial and discovery of it in these days of adversity. It was a weighty saying of Tertullian to the persecutors of the church in his days: "Your wickedness is the trial of our innocencey."—Constantius, the father of Constantine, made a decree, that all who would not renounce the Christian faith should lose their places of honour and profit. This presently separated the dross from the gold, which was his design; for many renounced Christianity, and thereupon were renounced by him, while those who held their integrity were received into favour.

In time of prosperity, hypocrisy lies covered in the heart, like nests in the green bushes; but when the winter of adversity has made them bare, every body may see them without searching.

But to come to close particulars—It will be necessary to inquire what effects of adversity are common to both the sound and the unsound, and, then, what are peculiar to either in this close trial by adversity.

SECT. II.—It will be expedient to the design I have in this discourse, to show, in the first place, what are the effects of adversity common to both the godly and ungodly; for in some things they differ not, but, as it is with the one, so also with the other.

1. Both the godly and ungodly may fear adversity before it comes. A wicked man cannot, and it is evident many godly men do not, come up to the height of that rule in James i. 2. “To account it all joy when they fall into divers temptations,” or trials by adversity. It is said in Isa. xxxiii. 14. “The sinners in Zion are afraid; trembling surpriseth the hypocrite,” under the apprehension of approaching calamities; and it is true also, that the saints in Zion may be afraid: “My flesh trembleth for fear of thee; and I am afraid of thy judgments,” said holy David. “The thing which I greatly feared,” said the upright Job, “is come upon me.” There is a vast difference betwixt a saint’s first meeting with afflictions, and his parting with them. He receives them sometimes with trembling; he parts with them rejoicing, smiling on them, and blessing them in the name of the Lord. So that by this the upright and the false heart are not discriminated. Even sanctified nature declines suffering and trouble.

2. Both the godly and ungodly may entertain afflictions with regret and unwillingness when they come. Afflictions and troubles are wormwood and

gall, Lam. iii. 19.; and that goes not down pleasantly with flesh and blood. “No affliction for the present seemeth joyous but grievous,” even to God’s own people: “they are in heaviness through manifold temptations,” or trials by the rod. When God gives the cup of affliction into the hands of the wicked, how do they loathe it! And though the portion of the saints’ cup be much sweeter than theirs, for that bitter ingredient of God’s vindictive wrath is not in it, yet even they shrink from it, and they are loath to taste it.

3. Both the one and the other may be impatient and fretful in adversity: it is the very nature of flesh and blood to be so. “The wicked are like the troubled sea, which cannot rest, whose waters cast forth mire and dirt.” This is an allusion to the unstable and stormy ocean. You know that there is naturally an estuation and working in the sea, whether it be incensed by the wind or not; but if a violent wind blow upon the unquiet ocean, O what a raging and foaming is there! what abundance of trash and filth doth it at such times cast out! Now, though grace make a great difference betwixt one and another, yet I dare not say but that even a gracious heart may be very unquiet and tumultuous in the day of affliction. Sanctified souls have their passions and lusts, which are too little mortified; even as sweetbrier and holly-thistles have their prickles, as well as the worthless bramble. Jonah was a good man, yet his soul was sadly distempered by adverse providences: “Yea,” says he, and that to his God, “I do well to be angry, even unto death.”

4. Both the one and the other may be weary of

the rod, and think the day of adversity a tedious day, wishing it were once at an end. Babylon shall be weary of the evil that God will bring upon it, Jer. li. And O that none of Zion's children were weary of adversity too ! How sad a moan does Job make of his long-continued affliction ! " Though I speak, my grief is not assuaged ; and though I forbear, what am I eased ? But now he hath made me weary." And if you look into Psalm vi. 3, 6. you may see another strong Christian even wearied in the way of affliction : " My soul," says David in that place, " is sore vexed : but thou, O Lord, how long ? I am weary with my groaning."

5. Both the one and the other may be driven to their knees by adversity : " Lord, in trouble have they visited thee ; they have poured out a prayer when thy chastening was upon them." Not that a godly person will pray no longer than the rod is at his back : O no ; he cannot live long without prayer, how few calls soever he may have to that duty by the rod ; but when the rod is on his back, he will be more frequently and more fervently upon his knees : indeed, many gracious hearts are like children's tops, which will go no longer than they are whipt ; they cannot find their knees and their tongues, till God find a rod to excite them. But this is a dangerous symptom. The same affliction may bring gracious and graceless souls to their knees : but though in the external matter of duty, and in the external call and occasion of duty, they seem to agree, yet is there a vast difference in the principles, manner, and ends of these their duties, as will evidently appear in its proper place in our following discourse.

But by what has been said in this section, you may see how in some things the holy upright soul acts too much like the unsanctified, and in other things how much the hypocrite may act like a saint. He may be externally humbled; so was Ahab. He may pray under the rod, Mal. ii. 13.: yea, and request others to pray for him; so did Simon, Acts viii. 24.

SECT. III.—But though the sound and unsound heart differs not in some external things under the rod, yet there are effects of adversity which are peculiar to either, and will discriminate them. To which end let us first see what effects adversity is usually followed with in unsound and carnal hearts: and we shall find, among others, these five symptoms of an ungodly heart appearing under crosses and afflictions:—

1. A graceless heart is not quickly and easily brought to see the hand of God in those troubles that befall it, and to be duly affected with it: “Lord, when thy hand is lifted up, they will not see.” When it has smitten, or is lifted up to smite, they shut their eyes. It is the malice of this man, or the negligence of that, or the unfaithfulness of another, that has brought all this trouble upon me. Thus the creature is the horizon that terminates their sight, and beyond that they usually see nothing. Sometimes indeed the hand of God is so immediately manifested, and convincingly discovered in afflictions, that they cannot avoid the sight of it; and then they may, in their way, pour out a prayer before him; but ordinarily they impute all to second causes, and overlook the first cause of their troubles.

2. Nor is it usual with these men under the rod to retire into their closets, and search their hearts there, to find out the particular cause and provocation of their affliction: "No man repented him of his wickedness, saying, What have I done?" What cursed thing is there in me, that has thus incensed the anger of God against me? God visits their iniquities with afflictions, but they visit not their own hearts by self-examination. God judges them, but they judge not themselves. He shows their iniquities in a clear glass, but none saith, "What have I done?" This phrase, "What have I done?" is the voice of one that recollects himself after a rash action; or the voice of a man astonished at the discovery afflictions make of his sins; but no such voice as this is ordinarily heard among carnal men.

3. An unsound professor, if left to his choice, would rather choose sin than affliction; and sees more evil in that than in this. And this cannot be doubted, if we consider that the principle by which all unregenerated men are actuated, is sense, not faith. Hence Job's friends would have argued his hypocrisy, Job xxxvi. 21.; and had their application been as right as their rule, it would have proved it: "This hast thou chosen, rather than affliction."

I do not say that an upright man cannot commit a moral evil, to escape a penal evil. O that daily observation did not too plentifully furnish us with sad instances of this kind! But upright ones do not, dare not, upon a serious deliberate discussion and debate, choose sin rather than affliction. What they may do from surprisals and in the violence of temptation, is of another nature.

But a false and unsound heart discovers itself in the choice it makes on deliberation, and that frequently when sin and trouble come in competition. "Put the case," says Augustine, "that a ruffian should with one hand set the cup of drunkenness to thy mouth, and with the other a dagger to thy breast, and say, Drink or die; thou shouldst rather choose to die sober, than to live a drunkard." And many Christians have resisted unto blood, striving against sin, and, with renowned Moses, chosen affliction, the worst of afflictions, yea, death itself in the most formidable appearance, rather than sin; and it is the habitual temper and resolution of every gracious heart so to do, though those holy resolutions are sometimes overborne by the violence of temptation.

But the hypocrite dreads less the defilement of his soul, than the loss of his estate, liberty, or life. If you ask, Upon what ground then does the Apostle suppose, in 1 Cor. xiii. 3. that a man may give his body to be burnt, and not have charity? that the salamander of hypocrisy may live in the flame of martyrdom? The answer is at hand: They that choose death in the sense of this text, do not choose it to escape sin, but to feed and indulge it. Those strange adventures, if any such there be, are rather to maintain their own honour, and enrol their names among worthy and famous persons to posterity, or out of a blind zeal for their espoused errors and mistakes, than in a due regard for the glory of God, and the preservation of integrity. "I fear to speak it, but it must be spoken," saith Hierom, "that even martyrdom itself, when suffered for admiration and applause, profits nothing; but is blood shed in vain."

4. It is the property of an unregenerate soul, under adversity, to turn from creature to creature for support and comfort, and not from every creature to God alone. So long as their feet can touch ground, so long as they can feel any creature-relief or comfort under them, they can subsist and live in afflictions; but when they lose ground, when all creature-refuge fails, then their hearts fail too.

Thus Zedekiah and the self-deceiving Jews, when they saw that their own strength failed them, and there was little hope left that they should deliver themselves from the Chaldeans, what do they in that strait? Do they, with upright Jehoshaphat, say, "Our eyes are unto thee?" No; their eyes were upon Egypt for succour, not upon heaven. Pharaoh and his aids are left them still, all hope is not gone, Jer. xxxvii. 9. See the like in Ahaz. In a sore distress, he courts the king of Assyria for help, 2 Chron. xxviii. 22. That project failing, then he will try what the gods of Damascus can do for him. Any way rather than the right way.

So it is with many others. If one child dies, how do they act? Run to God, and comfort themselves in this: The Lord liveth, though my child die? If an estate is lost and a family sinking, do they with David comfort themselves in the everlasting covenant, ordered and sure? No; but if one relation dies, there is another alive: if one estate is lost, yet not all; something is left still, and the case will mend. As long as such men have any visible encouragement, they will hang upon it; and not make up all in Christ, and encourage themselves in the Lord. To tell them of rejoicing in the Lord, when the fig-tree blossoms not, is what they cannot understand.

5. An unsound heart never comes out of the furnace of affliction purged, mortified, and more spiritual and holy than when he was cast into it. His scum and dross is not there separated from him; nay, the more he is afflicted, the worse he is. “Why should ye be smitten any more? Ye will revolt more and more.” And, to keep to our metaphor, consult Jer. vi. 29. God had put that incorrigible people, the Israelites, into the furnace of affliction, and kept them long in that fire; and what was the issue? “The bellows are burnt,” says the prophet, “the lead is consumed of the fire, the founder melteth in vain: reprobate silver shall men call them, because the Lord hath rejected them.” If the fire of affliction be continually blown till the very bellows be burnt, that is, the tongue, or rather the lungs of the prophet, which have some resemblance; though these be even spent in reproving, and threatening, and denouncing woe upon woe, and judgment upon judgment, and God fulfils his word upon them, yet still they are as before; the dross remains. Though Jerusalem be made a pot, and the inhabitants the flesh boiling in it, as is said in Ezek. xxiv. 6, 13. “the scum remains with them,” and cannot be separated by the fire; and the reason is plain, because no affliction in itself purges sin, but as it is sanctified, and works in the virtue of God’s blessing, and in pursuance of the promises.

O think on this, you that have had thousands of afflictions of one kind and another, and none of them all have done you good, nor mortified, humbled, or benefited you at all.

And thus you see what the effects of adversity are, when it meets with a graceless heart.

SECT. IV.—By this time, reader, I suppose thou art desirous to know what effects adversity and affliction generally have, when they meet with an honest and sincere heart. Only, before I come to particulars, I think it needful to acquaint thee, that the fruits of afflictions are mostly after-fruits, and not so discernible by the Christian himself under the rod, as after he has been exercised by it, and calmly reflects upon what is past, Heb. xii. 11. Nor does every Christian attain the same measure and degree: some rejoice, others commonly submit. But I think these seven effects are ordinarily found in all upright hearts that pass under the rod:—

1. The sincere and upright soul betakes itself to God in affliction, Job i. 20. When God was smiting, Job was praying; when God afflicted, Job worshipped. So David: “I found sorrow and trouble, then called I upon the name of the Lord.” And when the messenger of Satan buffeted Paul, “For this cause,” says he, “I besought the Lord thrice.” Alas! whither should a child go in distress, but to its father?

2. He sees and owns the hand of God in his afflictions, how much or little soever of the instruments of trouble appear. “The Lord hath taken away,” says Job. “God hath bidden him,” says David. If the blow come from the hand of a wicked man, yet he sees that wicked hand in God’s righteous hand. And this apprehension is fundamental to all that communion which men have with God in their afflictions, and to all the peaceableness and gracious submission of their spirits under the rod. He who sees nothing of God in his troubles, has nothing of God in his soul.

3. He can justify God in all the afflictions and troubles that come upon him, be they ever so severe. "Thou art just in all that is brought upon us," says Nehemiah. "Thou hast punished us less than our iniquities deserve," says Ezra. "It is of the Lord's mercies we are not consumed," says the church. Are we in Babylon? It is a mercy we are not in hell. If God condemn the believer, yet he will justify God. If God cast him into a sea of trouble, yet he will acknowledge, that in all that sea of trouble there is not one drop of injustice. If I have not deserved such usage from the hands of men, yet I have deserved worse than this at the hands of God.

4. Afflictions generally melt and humble gracious hearts. There is a habitual tenderness planted in their spirits, and a just occasion quickly draws it forth. And so usual a thing is it for gracious hearts to be humbled under the afflictings of God, that affliction is on that account called humiliation; the effect being put for the cause, to show that where one is, the other will be: "My God will humble me;" that is, he will afflict me with the sight of your sins and disorders; and if a gracious soul be so apt to be humbled for other men's sins, much more for its own.

5. The upright soul is inquisitive under the rod, to find out that evil for which the Lord contends with him by affliction: "Show me wherefore thou contendest with me." "That which I see not, teach thou me. If I have done iniquity, I will do no more." "Let us search and try our ways, and turn again to the Lord." In afflicting, God searches them; and under affliction, they search themselves.

They are willing to hear the voice of the rod, and glad of any discovery it makes in their hearts.

6. The upright heart chooseth to lie under affliction, rather than to be delivered from it by sin. I say, this is the choice and resolution of every upright heart, however it may be sometimes overborne by the violence of temptation: "Not accepting deliverance," that is, on sinful terms and conditions, Heb. xi. 35.

They are sensible how the flesh smarts under the rod, but had rather it should smart, than conscience should smart under guilt. Affliction, says an upright soul, grieves me, but sin will grieve God: affliction wounds my flesh, but sin will wound my soul. Deliverance I long for, but I will not pay so dearly for it, how much soever I desire it. Outward ease is sweet, but inward peace is sweeter.

7. He prizes the spiritual good gotten by affliction, above deliverance from it, and can bless God from his heart for those mercies, how dear soever his flesh has paid for them: "It is good for me that I have been afflicted." Such is the value the people of God have for spiritual graces, that they cannot think them dear, whatever their flesh has paid for them. The mortification of one lust, one discovery of sincerity, one manifestation of God to their souls, much more than makes amends for all that they have endured under the rod. Is patience improved, self-acquaintance increased, the vanity of the creature more effectually taught, longings after heaven inflamed? O blessed afflictions, that are attended with such blessed fruits! It was the saying of a holy man, under a sore trouble for the death of an only son, when in that dark day God had graciously manifested

himself to his soul, “O I would be contented, if it were possible to lay an only son in the grave every day I have to live in the world, for one such discovery of the love of God as I now enjoy.”



CHAPTER VI.

Showing, that indwelling sin is to grace, what fire is to gold ; and that the soundness and unsoundness of our hearts are discovered by it.

SECT. I.—Prosperity and adversity put sincerity to the trial ; but nothing makes a deeper search into our bosoms, nothing sifts our spirits more narrowly, or tells us what our state is more plainly, than our behaviour towards that corruption which dwells in us. The thorn is next neighbour to the rose. Sin and grace dwell not only in the same soul, but in the same faculties. The collier and fuller dwell in one room ; what one cleanses the other blackens. Of all the evils God permits in this world, none is more grievous to his people than this. They sometimes wonder why the Lord will suffer it to be so. Among other wise and holy ends of this permission, these are surely some. They are left to try you, and to humble you. There is no intrinsic goodness in sin ; but, however, in this it occasions good to us, that by our conduct towards it we discern our sincerity. The touchstone is a worthless stone in itself, but it serves to try the gold. “Whatsoever is born of God, doth not commit sin ; for his seed remaineth in him,

and he cannot sin, because he is born of God. In this the children of God are manifest, and the children of the devil :” In respect of their carriage towards sin, the one and the other is plainly manifested. This is that which separates the dross from the gold, and shows you what the true state of men’s persons, and the tempers of their hearts are. By not sinning, we are not to understand a total freedom from sin, as if it implied any such perfection of the people of God in this world : this is the Popish and Pelagian sense. Nor yet must we take it in the Arminian sense, who, to avoid the argument of the orthodox, will understand it of the sin against the Holy Ghost. What a strange thing would it be, to make that a characteristic note of distinction betwixt the godly and ungodly, which so very few, even of the most ungodly, are ever guilty of ! But the manner of our behaviour towards sin, and our carriage towards it before, or under, or after the commission of it, in that the children of God are manifest, and the children of the devil.

Now there are five things relating to sin that discriminate and mark the state of the persons. The difference is discernible, 1. In our abstinence from sin ; 2. Hatred of sin ; 3. Trouble about sin ; 4. Subjection to sin ; 5. Opposition to sin.

SECT. II.—The grounds and motives of our abstinence from sin very clearly manifest the state of our souls. What they are in the regenerate and unregenerate, is our next work.

1. Let it be considered, that an unsound and unrenewed heart may abstain from one sin, because it is contrary to, and inconsistent with, another sin. It

is with the sins of our nature, as it is with the diseases of our bodies. Though all diseases are contrary to health, yet some diseases, as the fever and palsy, are contrary to each other. So are prodigality and covetousness, hypocrisy and profaneness. These oppose each other, not for mutual destruction, as sin and grace do, but for superiority, each contending for the throne, and sometimes taking it by turns. It is with such persons as with that possessed man, Matt. xvii. 15. whom the spirit cast sometimes into the fire, sometimes into the water. Or if one subdue the other, yet the heart is also subdued to the vassalage of that lust which is uppermost in the soul.

2. An unrenewed man may be kept from the commission of some sin, not because there is a principle of grace within him, but because of some providential restraint without him, or upon him; for it often falls out, that when men have conceived sin, and are ready to execute it, Providence puts on them the fetters of restraint, and hinders them from so doing. This was the case with Abimelech, Gen. xx. "I withheld thee." And though persons so restrained have not the good of such providences, yet others have; for by it a world of mischief is prevented in the world, which otherwise would break out; and to this act of Providence we owe our lives, liberties, estates, and comforts in this world.

3. An unsound heart may not commit some sins, not because he truly hates them, but because his constitution inclines him not to them. These men are rather beholden to a good temper of body, than to a gracious temper of soul. Some men cannot be drunkards if they would, others cannot be covetous

and base; they are made of a more refined metal than others. But chaste and liberal, just and sober nature, is but nature still. The best nature, in all its endowments, is but nature at the best.

4. A graceless heart may be restrained from sin by the force of education, and principles of morality that have been instilled into it. Thus Jehoash was restrained from sin: "And Jehoash did that which was right in the sight of the Lord, all the days wherein Johoiadah the priest instructed him." The fear of a parent or master will do a great deal more with some in this case than the fear of God. The influences of strict education nip off the excrescences of budding vice. The way we are taught when young, we keep when old. This is the influence of man upon man, not the influence of the regenerating Spirit upon men.

5. A graceless heart may be kept from some sins by fear of the events, both in this world, and in that to come. Sin that is followed with infamy and reproach among men, may on this ground be forborne; not because God has forbidden it, but because human laws will punish it, and the sober world will brand us for it. And some look farther, to the punishment of sin in hell. They are not afraid to sin, but they are afraid to burn. Here sin is like a sweet rose in a brake of thorns; fain we would have it, but are loath to tear our flesh to obtain it. It is good that sin is prevented any way; but to be kept on this ground from sin, does not argue the state of the person to be good. And thus you see some of the grounds on which carnal men are restrained: and in this "the children of the devil are manifest."

SECT. III.—But there are grounds of abstinence from sin, by which “the children of God are also manifested;” and such are these that follow:—

1. A sincere heart dares not sin because of the eye and fear of God, which is upon him. So you find it in Job xxxi. 1, 4. He durst not allow his thoughts to sin, because he lived under the awe of God’s eye. Nehemiah durst not do as former governors had done, though an opportunity presented to enrich himself, “because of the fear of his God.” The soul that lives under the awe of this Eye, will be as conscientious where no discovery can be made by creatures, as if all the world were looking on. “Thou shalt not curse the deaf, nor put a stumbling-block before the blind; but shalt fear thy God: I am the Lord.” What if a man do curse the deaf, the deaf cannot hear him; and what if he do put a stumbling-block before the blind, the blind cannot see him. True, but God sees him; God hears him. That is enough to a man who has the fear of the Lord upon his heart.

2. As the fear of God, so the love of God, is a principle of restraint from sin to the soul that is upright. This kept back Joseph from sin: “How can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?” “How can I?” He speaks as a man who feels himself bound up from sin by the goodness and love of God that had been manifested to him. Hath he delivered me from the pit into which my envious brethren cast me? Hath he, in so miraculous a way, advanced me to all this honour and power in Egypt? And now, after all his kindness and love to me, shall I sin against him? O how can I do

this against so good, so gracious a God? So Psalm xcvi. 10. "Ye that love the Lord, hate evil." Love will cry out in the hour of temptation, Is this thy kindness to thy friend? Dost thou thus requite the Lord for all his kindnesses?

3. As the love of God, so the intrinsic evil and filthiness that is in sin, keeps back the gracious soul from it. "Abhor that which is evil:" hate it as hell itself; or, as the French translation has it, "Be in horror." As the apprehensions of hell, so the apprehensions of sin, impress horror upon the mind that is sanctified. Nothing is more loathsome to a holy soul. Its aversations from it are with the highest indignation and loathing.

4. The renewed nature of a saint restrains him from sin: "The spirit lusteth against the flesh, so that ye cannot do the thing ye would." "Ye cannot!" why cannot ye? because it is against your new nature.

Beloved, this is a very remarkable thing in the experience of all renewed men, that, upon the renovation of men's principles, their delights, and their aversions and loathings, are quite opposite to what they were before. In their carnal state, vain company and sinful exercises were their delight. To be separated from these, and tied to prayer, meditation, heavenly discourse and company, O what a bondage would that have been! Now, to be tied to such carnal society, and restrained from such duties of godliness, and the society of the godly, is become a much sorer bondage to the soul.

5. Experience of the bitterness of sin, is a restraint to a gracious heart. They who have had so many

sick days and sorrowful nights for sin, are loath to taste that wormwood and gall again which their soul hath still in remembrance: "In that ye sorrowed after a godly sort, what carefulness it wrought!" The believer would not grapple with those inward troubles again, he would not have the cheerful light of God's countenance eclipsed again, for all, and much more than all, the pleasures that are in sin.

6. The consideration of the sufferings of Christ for sin, powerfully withholds a gracious soul from the commission of it. "Our old man is crucified with him, that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin." Were there a knife or sword in the house, that had been thrust through the heart of your father, could you ever endure the sight of it? Sin was the sword that pierced Christ, and so the death of Christ becomes the death of sin in his people. Thus the children of God and the children of the devil are manifest, in the principles and reasons of their abstinence from sin.

SECT. IV.—They are also manifested by their hatred of sin. This puts a clear distinction betwixt them; for no false or unregenerate heart can hate sin as sin.

1. He may indeed hate sin in another, but not in himself. Thus one proud man hates another. Diogenes, when he trampled Plato's fine clothes under foot, said, "I spurn the pride of Plato." Plato replied, "Thou tramplest upon my pride, but it is with greater pride." "Why," said Christ to the hypocrite, "beholdest thou the mote that is in thy brother's eye, but considerest not the beam that is in thine own eye?" How quick in espying, and rash

in censuring, the smallest fault in another, is the hypocrite ! It was but one fault, and that but a small one, but a mote, that he could find in another ; yet this he quickly discerns. It may be there were many excellent graces in him ; these he overlooks, but the mote he plainly discerns. It may be that mote in his brother's eye had drawn many tears from it, but these he takes no notice of : and meanwhile there is a beam, a great, horrid, flagitious evil, in himself ; but it is too near him to be discerned or bewailed. This is a sad symptom of a naughty heart.

2. He may hate it in its effects and consequences, not in its own nature ; as the thief hates the gallows, not the wickedness that he has done. It is not sin itself, but sin in its connection with hell, that is frightful to him. The unsound professor could wish that there were no such threatening in the Bible against sin. When sin tempts him, I would consent, says he, but I fear the consequence. O sin, could I separate thee from hell, nothing should separate thee and me.

3. He may hate it for a moment or a pang, but not with a rooted, habitual hatred. It is plain, from 2 Peter ii. 22. that sin may sometimes lie upon the conscience of an unregenerate man, as a load lies upon a sick stomach ; and so he may discharge himself of it by reformation, restitution : but a little time reconciles the quarrel betwixt him and his lust again. If they fall out, they will fall in again : “ The dog returned to his vomit, and the sow that was washed, to her wallowing in the mire.”

But an upright soul hates sin in another manner ; and in this hatred of sin the children of God are manifest.

1. The opposition of sin to God, is the very ground and formal reason upon which a gracious soul opposes and hates it. If it be opposite to the holy nature and law of God, it cannot but be odious in his eyes. This cut David's heart: "Against thee, thee only, have I sinned." I have wronged Uriah greatly; I have wronged myself and family greatly: but the wrong I have done to others is not worth naming, in comparison of the wrong I have done to thee.

2. The upright soul hates sin in himself more than he hates it in any other; as a man hates a serpent in the hedge, but much more in his own bosom. "I see another law in my members:" "I find then a law, that when I would do good, evil is present with me." I do not know how others find it, but I am sure I find sin in my very bosom, in my very bowels; it is present with me. "O wretched man that I am!" A gracious soul can mourn to see it in others, but to find it in himself pierces him to the very heart.

3. The gracious soul hates not only this or that particular sin, but the whole kind, every thing that is sinful. True hatred is of the whole nature or kind: "I hate every false way." His reasonings proceed from sin as sin, concluding against every sin; sins that are profitable and pleasant, as well as sins that have neither profit nor pleasure; sins that are secret, as well as sins that are open, and such as will defame him.

And before this trial a false heart cannot stand; for he always indulges some lust. There is an iniquity from which he cannot be separated.

4. The sincere soul hates sin with an irreconcilable

hatred. There was a time when sin and his soul fell out; but there never will be a time of reconciliation betwixt them again. That breach, which effectual conviction once made, can never be made up any more: "They will return no more to folly." And, indeed, it seems to them who have suffered so much for sin, who have endured so many fears and sorrows for it, the greatest folly in the world to return to sin again. No; they admire the mercy of their escape from sin to their dying day, and never look back upon their former state but with shame and grief. Ask a convert, Would you be back again where once you were? Would you be among your old companions again? Would you be fulfilling the lusts of the flesh again? And he will tell you, he would not run the hazard of abiding one day or one night in that condition again, to gain all the kingdoms of the world the next morning.

5. The sincere soul hates sin with a superlative hatred. He hates it more than any other evil in the world besides. Penal evils are not pleasant in themselves; but yet if he must endure them or sin, then he chooses sufferings: "choosing rather to suffer affliction than enjoy the pleasures of sin;" the worst of sufferings, rather than the best of sins.

6. So deep is the hatred that upright ones bear to sin, that nothing pleases them more than the thoughts of a full deliverance from it. "I thank God, through Jesus Christ our Lord." What does he so heartily thank God for? For a prospect of his final deliverance from sin; never to be entangled, defiled, or troubled with it any more. And this is one thing that sweetens death to the saints as much as any

thing in the world can do, except Christ's victory over it, and lying in the grave for us. To think of a grave, is not pleasant in itself; but to think of a parting-time with sin, that is sweet and pleasant indeed.

SECT. V.—The children of God and the children of the devil, pure gold and vile dross, are manifest, as in hatred of sin, so in their troubles and sorrows about sin.

All trouble for sin argues not sincerity. Some have reason to be troubled even for their troubles for sin.

1. And they are of this number, who are troubled only for the commission of some more gross sins that startle the natural conscience, but not for inward sins that defile the soul. Judas was troubled for betraying innocent blood, but not for that base lust of covetousness that was the root of it, or the want of sincere love to Jesus Christ. Outward sins are sins of greater scandal, but heart-sins are oftentimes sins of greater guilt. To be troubled for grosser sins, and have no trouble for ordinary sins daily incurred, is an ill sign of a bad heart.

2. A graceless heart may be much troubled at the discovery of sin, when it is not troubled for the guilt of sin: "As the thief is ashamed when he is found, so is the house of Israel ashamed." Hence it is, that some men stick not to commit ten sins against God, to hide one sin from the eyes of men. It is a mercy that sin is the matter of men's shame, and that all are not arrived at that height of impudence to declare their sin as Sodom, and glory in their shame. But to be ashamed only because men see it, and not with Ezra, to say, "O my God, I am ashamed, and

blush to look up unto thee," ashamed that thou seest it,—this is but hypocrisy.

3. A ~~gracious~~ heart may be troubled also for the rod that sin draws after it, but not for sin itself, as it provokes God to inflict rods.

But the troubles of upright ones for sin are of another kind and nature.

1. They are troubled that God is wronged, and his Spirit troubled by their sins. So the penitent prodigal: "I have sinned against heaven, and in thy sight:" against heaven, that is, against him whose throne is in heaven—a great, glorious, and infinite Majesty! A poor worm of the earth has lifted up his hand against the God of heaven.

2. They are troubled for the defilement of their own souls by sin. Hence they are compared, in Prov. xxv. 26. to a troubled fountain. You know it is the property of a living spring, when any filth falls into it, or that which lies in the bottom of its channel is raised, and defiles its streams, never to leave working until it has purged itself of it, and recovered its purity again. So it is with a righteous man. He loves purity in the precept, Psalm cxix. 140.; and he loves it no less in the principle and practice. He thinks it is hell enough to lie under the pollution of sin, if he should never come under damnation for it.

3. They are troubled for the estrangements of God, and the hidings of his face from them because of their sin. It would go close to an ingenuous spirit, to see a dear and faithful friend, whom he has grieved, to look strange and shy upon him at the next meeting, as if he did not know him; much more

does it go to the heart of a gracious man, to see the face of God turned from him, and not to be towards him as in times past. This went to David's heart after his fall, as you may see in Psalm li. 11. "Cast me not away from thy presence, and take not thy Holy Spirit from me." Lord, if thou turn thy back upon me, and estrange thyself from me, I am a lost man; that is the greatest mischief that can befall me.

Their troubles for sin run deep in comparison with what other men's do. They are strong to bear other troubles, but sink and faint under this, Psalm xxxviii.

4. Other sorrows may, for the present, be violent, and make more noise, but this sorrow sinks deeper into the soul.

5. Their troubles for sin are more private and silent troubles than others are: their "sore runs in the night," as it is in Psalm lxxvii. 2. Not but that they may, and do open their troubles to men; and it is a mercy when they meet with a judicious, tender, and experienced Christian to unbosom themselves unto; but, when all is done, it is God and thy soul alone that must whisper out the matter. That is indeed a sincere sorrow for sin, which is expressed secretly to God in the closet.

6. Their troubles are incurable by creature-comforts. It is not the removing of some outward pressures and inconveniences that can remove their burden. Nothing but pardon, peace, and witnessed reconciliation, can quiet the gracious heart.

7. Their troubles for sin are ordinate, and kept in their own place. They dare not stamp the dignity of Christ's blood upon their worthless tears and groans for sin. "Lord, wash my sinful tears in the blood of Christ," was once the desire of a true penitent.

And thus our trouble for sin shows us what our hearts are.

SECT. VI.—The behaviour and carriage of the soul with respect to subjection to the commands of sin, shows what our estate and condition is. This will separate dross from gold. All unregenerate men are the servants of sin; they subject themselves to its commands. This the Scripture sometimes calls a “conversation in the lusts of the flesh;” sometimes the “selling of themselves to sin.” Now, as Dr. Reynolds observes, though the children of God complain, with Paul, that they are “sold under sin,” yet there is a vast difference betwixt these two: the saints are sold to it by Adam, but others by their own continued consent. But, to show you the difference in this matter, I conceive it necessary to show wherein the reigning power of sin does not consist, and then wherein it does; that you may plainly discern who are in subjection to the reigning power of their corruptions, and who are not. Now, there are divers things common both to the regenerate and unregenerate; and we cannot say the dominion of sin lies in any or in all of them, abstractedly and simply considered.

1. Both one and the other having original corruption dwelling in them, may also find this fountain breaking forth into gross and scandalous sins. But we cannot say, that because original corruption thus breaks forth into gross and scandalous sins in both, therefore it must needs reign in the one as well as in the other. A righteous man may “fall before the wicked.” He may fall into the dirt of grosser iniquities, and furnish them with matter of reproach.

So did David, Peter, Abraham, and many more of the Lord's upright-hearted ones, whose souls nevertheless sin did not reign over by a voluntary subjection to its commands; nor must this embolden any to sin with more liberty.

2. Though an upright soul fall once and again into sin, though he reiterate the same act of sin which he has repented of before, yet it cannot merely from thence be concluded, that therefore sin reigns over him, as it does over a wicked man who makes it his daily trade. I confess every reiteration of sin puts a further aggravation upon it; and it is said that we should repent and sin, and sin and repent; but yet you read, in Prov. xxiv. 16. "A just man falleth seven times, and riseth up again." Job's friends were good men, yet he tells them, "These ten times have ye reproached me." This indeed shows a heart that greatly needs purging; for it is with relapses into spiritual, as it is with relapses into natural diseases: return of the disease shows that the morbid matter was not duly purged. But though it shows the foulness, it does not always prove the falseness, of the heart.

3. Though the one may be impatient of the reproof of his sin, as well as the other, yet that alone will not conclude sin to be in full dominion over the one, as it is over the other. It is a pity that any good man should storm at a just rebuke of sin; that such a precious oil as is proper to heal, should be imagined to break his head; but yet flesh will be tender and touchy, even in good men. Asa was a good man, and yet he was wroth with the prophet who reproved him, 2 Chron. xvi. 10. Yet I doubt

not but that their consciences smite them for it, when pride suffers not another to do it. A reproof may be well-timed and ill-managed by another, and so may provoke; but they will hear the voice of conscience in another manner.

4. Though in both some one particular sin may have more power than another, yet neither does this alone prove, that therefore that sin must reign in one as it does in another. Indeed, the beloved lust of every wicked man is king over his soul; but yet a godly man's constitution or calling may incline him more to one sin than another; and yet neither that nor any other may be said to be in dominion: for though David speaks of his iniquity, his special sin, in Psalm xviii. 23. which some suppose to be the sin of lying, from that intimation in Psalm cxix. 19.; yet you see in one place he begs God to keep him from it, and in the other he tells us he kept himself from it, and both show he was not the servant of it.

5. Though both may sin against knowledge, yet it will not follow from thence, that therefore sins against knowledge must needs be sins in dominion in the one, as they are in the other. There was too much light abused and violence offered in David's deliberated sin, as he confesses in Psalm li. 6. and the sad story itself too plainly shows; and yet, in the main, David was an upright man still; though this consideration of the fact wounded his integrity, and stands upon record for a caution to all others.

SECT. VII. We have seen what does not infer the dominion of sin in the former particulars, being simply considered; I shall next show you what does, and how sincere and false hearts are distinguished in this trial.

1. Assent and consent upon deliberation notes the soul to be under the dominion of sin. When the mind approves sin, and the will gives its plenary consent to it, this sets up sin in its throne, and puts the soul into subjection to it; for the dominion of sin consists in its authority over us, and our voluntary subjection to it. This you find to be the character of a wicked graceless person: "He deviseth mischief upon his bed; he setteth himself in a way that is not good; he abhorreth not evil."

The best men may fall into sin through mistake, or be precipitated into sin through the violence of temptation; but to devise mischief, and set himself in an evil way, this notes full assent of the mind; and then not to abhor evil, notes full consent of the will; and these two being given to sin, not only antecedently to the acting of it, but also consequently to it, to like it afterwards as well as before: this puts the soul fully under the power of the sin. What can it give more? This, in direct opposition to the apostle, Rom. xii. 1. is to present their bodies a dead sacrifice, unholy, and abominable to God, acceptable to the devil, which is their unreasonable service. All men by nature are given to sin, but these men give themselves to it.

2. The customary practice of sin subjects the soul to the dominion of sin; and so, "He that is born of God doth not commit sin." Fall into sin, yea, the same sin, he may, and that often; but then it is not without reluctance, repentance, and a protest entered by the soul in heaven against it; so that sin has not a quiet possession of his soul. He is not the servant of sin, nor does he willingly walk after its command-

ments; but so do its own servants: it is their daily practice; "they proceed from evil to evil."

3. Delight in sin proves the dominion of sin. So the servants of sin are described: "They have chosen their own ways, and their soul delighteth in their abominations."

As our delight in God is the measure of our holiness, so our delight in sin is the measure of our sinfulness. Delight in sin is the uppermost round of the ladder, and much higher the soul of a sinner cannot go, till it be turned off into hell: "It is a sport to a fool to do mischief." He is never merrier than when he has the devil for his play-fellow.

4. Impatience of Christ's yoke and government, argues the soul to be the subject of sin. This is clear from the apostle's reasoning: "But God be thanked, that ye were the servants of sin; but ye have obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine which was delivered you. Being then made free from sin, ye became the servants of righteousness." Where you see plainly, that no man can have his manumission or freedom from sin, who comes not into Christ's service, and yields himself up to his obedience. So then, to fret at Christ's laws that tie us up from our lusts, to be weary of all spiritual employments as a burden intolerable, never to be in our element and centre till we are off from God, and plunging in the world and our lusts,—this is a sad note of a soul in subjection to sin.

Obj. But it may be said, May not an upright soul find some weariness in spiritual things?

Sol. Doubtless he may, for he has flesh as well as spirit; and "though the spirit be willing, the flesh

is weak :” he is sanctified but in part, and his delight in the law of God is but according to, or “after the inner man;” but he sees another law in his members, that is, contrary inclinations. If, however, he be weary sometimes in the duties of godliness, he is more weary out of them, and is not centered and at rest till he be with his God again : but the carnal heart is where it would be when it is in the service of sin, and as a fish upon dry land when engaged in spiritual duties, especially such as are secret, and have no external allurements of reputation to engage him to them.

But what surprisals or captivities to sin soever may befall an upright soul, yet it appears by these eight following particulars, that he is not the servant of sin, nor in full subjection to it :—

1. Though he may be drawn into sin, yet he cannot reflect upon his sin without shame and sorrow, which plainly shows it to be an involuntary surprise. So Peter wept bitterly, and David mourned for his sin heartily. Others can fetch new pleasures out of their old sins, by reflecting on them ; and some can glory in their shame : some are stupid and senseless after sin ; and the sorrow of a carnal heart for it, is but a morning dew ; but it is far otherwise with God’s people.

2. Though a saint may be drawn into sin, yet it is not with a deliberate and full consent of his will : “ Their delight is in the law of God,”—“ They do that which they would not ;” there are inward dislikes from the new nature. And as for the case of David, which seems to have so much of counsel and deliberation in it, yet it was but in a single act ; it was

not in the general course of his life: he was upright in all things, that is, in the general course and tenor of his life.

3. Though an upright soul may fall into sin, yet he is restless and unquiet in that condition, like a bone out of joint; and that bespeaks him to be none of sin's servants: as, on the contrary, if a man be engaged in the external duties of religion, and be restless and unquiet there, his heart not being in it, he not being at rest till he is again in his earthly business; this man cannot be reckoned Christ's servant. ? A gracious heart is much after that rate employed in the work of sin, that a carnal heart is employed in the work of religion. That is a good rule, That is a man's true temper, wherein he is at rest. Poor David fell into sin; but he had no rest in his bones because of it. If his heart be off from God and duty for a little while, yet he recollects himself, and says, "Return to thy rest, O my soul."

4. Though a sincere Christian fall into sin and commit evil, yet he proceeds not from evil to evil, as the ungodly do, Jer. ix. 3.; but makes his fall into one sin a caution to prevent another sin. Peter by his fall got establishment for the time to come. If God will speak peace to them, they are careful to return no more to folly: "In that ye sorrowed after a godly sort, what carefulness it wrought! yea, what fear!" It is not so with the servants of sin. One sin leaves them much more disposed to another sin.

5. A sincere Christian may be drawn into sin, but yet he would be glad with all his heart to be rid of sin. It would be more to him than thousands of gold and silver, that he might grieve and offend God

no more: and that shows sin is not in dominion over him. He who is under the dominion of sin, is loath to leave his lusts. Sin's servants are not willing to part with it: they hold it fast, and refuse to let it go, as that text expresses it, Jer. viii. 5. But the great complaint of the upright is expressed by the apostle, according to the true sense of their hearts, in Rom. vii. 24. "Who shall deliver me from the body of this death?"

6. It appears that they yield not themselves willingly to obey sin, inasmuch as it is the matter of their joy when God orders any providence to prevent sin in them. "Blessed be the Lord," said David to Abigail, "and blessed be thy advice, and blessed be thou that hast kept me this day from shedding blood." Here is blessing upon blessing for a sin-preventing providence. The Author is blessed, the instrument blessed, the means blessed. O it is a blessed thing, in the eyes of a sincere man, to be kept from sin! He reckons it a great deliverance, a very happy escape, if he is kept from sin.

7. This shows that some who may be drawn to commit sin are yet none of the servants of sin, that they do heartily beg the assistance of grace to keep them from sin: "Keep back thy servant from presumptuous sins," says the Psalmist: "let them not have dominion over me;" that is, Lord, I find propensities to sin in my nature, yea, and strong ones too; if thou leave me to myself, I am carried into sin as easily as a feather is carried down the torrent. O Lord, keep back thy servant. And there is no petition that upright ones pour out their hearts to God in, either more frequently or more ardently, than in this, to be kept back from sin.

8. This shows the soul not to be under the dominion of sin, that it does not only cry to God to be kept back from sin, but uses the means of prevention itself. It resists it, as well as prays against it: "I was also upright before him, and kept myself from mine iniquity." So Job xxxi. 1. "I have made a covenant with mine eyes;" and yet more fully in Isa. xxxiii. 15. "He shaketh his hands from holding bribes, and stoppeth his ears from hearing blood, and shutteth his eyes from seeing evil." See with what care the portals are shut, at which sin is accustomed to enter.

All these things are very relieving considerations to poor souls questioning their integrity under the frequent surprisals of sin. And the next trial is no less so.

SECT. VIII.—Our opposition to, and conflicts with sin, discover what we are: gold or dross.

There are conflicts with sin both in the regenerate and in the unregenerate; but there is a vast difference betwixt them, as will appear in the following account:—

1. There is a universal, and there is a particular opposition to sin. The former is found in regenerate, the latter in unregenerate souls. A gracious heart hates every false way; and must needs do so, because it hates and opposes sin as sin; so that it can have no excepted or reserved lust, but fights against the whole body, and every limb and member of the body of sin. But it is not so with the hypocrite or carnal professor. He has some reserved sin that he cannot part with.

2. There is an opposition betwixt the new nature

and sin, and there is an opposition betwixt a natural conscience and sin; the former is the case of an upright soul, the latter may be a self-deceiver.

A regenerate person opposes sin, because there is an irreconcilable antipathy betwixt it and the new nature in him, as is clear from Gal. v. 17. "The flesh lusteth against the spirit, and the spirit against the flesh: and these are contrary the one to the other." By flesh, we are to understand corrupt nature; by spirit, not only the spirit of man, but the Spirit of God, or principle of regeneration in man. By the lusting of these two against each other, we are to understand the desire and endeavour of each other's destruction and ruin; and the ground of all this is the contrariety of these two natures. These are contrary one to the other. There is a twofold opposition betwixt them: one formal, their very natures are opposite; the other effective, their workings and designs are opposite, as it is betwixt fire and water.

But the opposition found in unrenewed souls against sin, is not from their natures, for sin is suitable enough to that; but from the light that is in their minds and consciences, which scares and terrifies them. Such was that in Darius: "He was sore displeased with himself, and set his heart on Daniel to deliver him; and laboured till the going down of the sun to deliver him." Here the contest was betwixt sense of honour on one side, and conviction of conscience on the other side. Sometimes a generous and noble disposition opposes sordid and base actions. "I am greater, and born to greater things, than that I should be a slave to my body," said a brave heathen.

3. There is a permanent, and there is a transient opposition to sin. The former is the case of God's people, the latter of temporary and unsound professors.

The saint, when he draws the sword in his warfare against sin, throws away the scabbard. No end of this combat with sin till life end. His life and his troubles are finished together: "I have fought the good fight, and have finished my course." But in other men it is but a transient quarrel; they are out with sin one day, and in with it another: and the reason is plain, by what was noted before—it is not the opposition of two natures. It is like the opposition of the wind and tide; these may be contrary, and make a stormy sea to-day, but the wind may come about, and go as the tide goes to-morrow. In a Christian, it is the opposition of the river and the dam: one must give way to the other; there is no reconciling them; but the other, "like the dog, returns to his vomit."

4. There is an opposition to the root of sin, and an opposition to the fruits of sin. A gracious soul opposes root and fruit, but others the latter only. The great design of an upright soul, is not only to lop off this or that branch, but to kill the root of sin which is in his nature: "Who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" But the great care and endeavour of others is to suppress outward acts of sin, and escape the mischievous consequences of it; yea, their study is, as Lactanius phrases it, "to hide, rather than to kill their lusts."

5. There is an opposition to sin in the strength of God, and an opposition to sin in our own strength. The former is proper to real Christians, the latter is

found frequently with unsanctified persons. When Christians go forth against any sin, it is in the strength of God: so their rule directs them, “Be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might: take unto you the whole armour of God.” And you will accordingly find them frequently upon their knees begging strength from heaven against their lusts: “For this cause I besought the Lord thrice,” says Paul—that is, often and earnestly, that the temptation might depart from him. But others go forth against sin in the strength of their own resolutions only. The resolutions or vows which they have put themselves under, are as frequently frustrated as made.

6. There is a successful opposition to sin, and an opposition that comes to nothing. The former is that of true Christians; the latter is found among unregenerate men.

The work of mortification in the saints is progressive and increasing. Hence we read, in Rom. vi. 6. “Our old man is crucified with him, that the body of sin might be destroyed.” Sin dies in believers much as crucified persons die, a slow, lingering, gradual, but sure death. Its vigour and life expire by degrees, or as a consumptive person dies; for to that also the apostle alludes here. There is a disease, which is called a consumption of the whole; and those who die of that disease, languish more and more, till at last they drop by imperceptible degrees into the grave. But in the unregenerate, whatever conflicts they may have with sin, no corruption falls before them. It may be said of them, as the church in another case complains of herself, “We have been in pain; we have, as it were, brought forth wind. We

have not wrought any deliverance in the earth, neither have the inhabitants of the world fallen." So it fares with these professors. They pray, they hear, they vow, they resolve; but, when all is done, their lusts are as strong and vigorous as ever: no degree of mortification appears after all.—Thus much of the trial of our sincerity by our carriage towards sin.

CHAPTER VII.

The proof, or trial, that is made of the soundness of our graces by the duties of religion which we perform.

SECT. I.—We now come, according to the method proposed, to make trial of the truth or falseness of grace, by the duties we daily perform in religion. And certainly they also have the use and efficacy of fire for discovery. “He that saith, I know him, and keepeth not his commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him. But whoso keepeth his word, in him verily is the love of God perfected: and hereby know we that we are in him.” This is a practical lie of which the apostle speaks here; a lie by which men deceive others for a while, and themselves for ever; a lie not spoken, but done, when a man’s course of life contradicts his profession. The life of a hypocrite is but one longer or continued lie. He says or professes that he knows God, but takes no care at all to obey him in the duties he commands. He either neglects them, or if he performs them, it is not as God

requires. If he draws nigh unto him with his lips, yet his heart is far from him: "Thou art near in their mouth, but far from their reins."

There are some who feel the influence and power of their communion with the Lord in duties, going down into their very reins; and there are others whose lips and tongues only are touched with religion. This is an age of light and much profession. Men cannot now keep up a reputation in the sober and professing world, whilst they totally neglect the duties of religion; but surely, if men would be but just to themselves, their very performance of duty would tell them what their hearts are.

SECT. II.—There are, among others, these following particulars, that very clearly distinguish the sound from the unsound professor:—

1. The designs and real aims of men's hearts in duty will tell them what they are.

A hypocrite aims low. "They have not cried unto me with their heart, when they howled upon their beds: they assemble themselves for corn and wine, and they rebel against me." It is not for Christ and pardon, for mortification and holiness, but for corn and wine. Thus they make a market of religion. All their ends in duty are either carnal, natural, or legal; either to accomplish their carnal ends, or to satisfy and quiet their consciences; and so their duties are performed as a sin-offering to God.

But an upright heart has very high and pure aims in duty. The desire of their soul is to God, Isa. xxvi. 8. Their soul follows hard after God. "One thing have I desired of the Lord, that I will seek after, that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all

the days of my life, to see the beauty of the Lord, and to inquire in his temple." These are the true eagles that aim at the sun, and will not stoop to low and earthly objects. Alas ! if the enjoyment of God be missed in a duty, it is not the greatest enlargement of gifts that will satisfy. The Christian comes back from it like a man who has taken a long journey to meet his friend upon important business, and lost his labour ; his friend was not there.

2. The engagements of men's hearts to God in duties, will tell them what they are.

Hypocrites take little heed to their hearts, Isa. xxix. 13. They are not afflicted really for the hardness, deadness, unbelief, and wanderings of their hearts in duty, as upright ones are ; nor do they engage their hearts, and labour to get them up with God in duty, as his people do. " I have entreated thy favour with my whole heart," says David. True Christians are not pleased in duty until they feel their hearts stand towards God, like a bow in its full bent. I say not that it is always so with them—what would they give that it might be so ? but, surely, if their souls in duty are empty of God, they are filled with trouble and sorrow.

3. The conscience that men make of secret, as well as of public duties, will tell them what their hearts and graces are, whether true or false. A vain professor is curious in the former, and either negligent, or, at best, formal in the latter ; for he finds no inducements of honour, applause, or ostentation of gifts, externally moving him to them ; nor has he any experience of the sweetness and benefit of such duties internally, to allure and engage his soul to

them. The hypocrite therefore is not for the closet, but the synagogue, Matt. vi. 5, 6. Not but that education, example, or the impulse of conscience, may sometimes drive him thither ; but it is not his daily delight to be there, his meat and drink to retire from the clamour of the world, to enjoy God in secret. It is the observation of their duties that is the great inducement to these men to perform them ; and, “ verily,” says our Lord, “ they have their reward ;” they have it away, or they have carried off all the benefit and advantage that ever they shall have by religion. Much good may their applause and honour do them ! Let them make much of that airy reward, for it is all that ever they shall have.

But now, as for a soul truly gracious, it cannot long subsist without secret prayer. It is true there is not always an equal freedom and delight, a like enlargement and comfort in its retirements, but yet it cannot be without them ; it finds the want of secret in its public duties. If the Christian and his God have not met in secret, and had some communion in the morning, he sensibly finds it in the deadness and unprofitableness of his heart and life all the day after.

4. The spirituality of our duties tries the sincerity of our graces. An unregenerate heart is carnal, whilst engaged in duties that are spiritual. Some men deceive themselves in thinking they are spiritual men, because their employments and calling is about spiritual things, Hosea ix. 7. This indeed gives them the denomination, but not the frame of spiritual men. And others judge themselves spiritual persons, because they frequently perform and attend upon spiritual duties. But, alas ! the heart and state may be

carnal notwithstanding all this. O my friends, it is not enough that the object of your duties is spiritual, that they respect a holy God; nor that the matter is spiritual, that you are conversant about holy things; but the frame of your heart must be spiritual; a heavenly temper of soul is necessary; and what are the most heavenly duties without it? The end and design you aim at must be spiritual, the enjoyment of God, and a growing conformity to him in holiness; else, multiply duties as the sand on the sea-shore, and they all will not amount to one evidence of your sincerity? “God is my witness, whom I serve with my spirit,” says the apostle. He seems to appeal to God in this matter. I serve God in my spirit, and God knows that I do so. I dare appeal to him that it is so. He knows that my heart is with him, or would be with him, in my duties. The arms of my faith do either sensibly grasp, or are stretched out towards him in my duties. O how little favour do gracious hearts find in the most excellent duties, if God and their souls do not sensibly meet in them!

Certainly, reader, there is a time when God comes nigh to men in duty, when he deals familiarly with men, and sensibly fills their souls with unusual powers and delights. The near approaches of God to their souls are felt by them, and now are their minds abstracted and marvellously refined from all that is material and earthly, and swallowed up in spiritual excellencies and glories. These are the real prelibations or foretastes of glory, which no man can by words make another to understand, as he himself does who feels them. These seasons, I con-

fess, do but rarely occur to the best of Christians, nor continue long when they do. Alas! this wine is too strong for such weak bottles as we are. "Hold, Lord," a holy man once said; "it is enough, thy poor creature is a clay vessel, and can hold no more." This is that joy unspeakable and full of glory, which is mentioned in 1 Pet. i. 7, 8.; something that words cannot describe. These seasons are the golden spots of our lives, when we are admitted to these near and ineffable views and tastes of God.

Possibly some poor Christians can say but little to these things. Their sorrows are exercised in duties, more than their joys; they are endeavouring to mount, but the stone hangs at the heel; they essay, but cannot rise to that height that others do, who are got up by their labouring faith into the upper region, and there display their wings, and sing in the sun-beams. But though they cannot reach this height, yet have they no satisfaction in duties wherein there is no intercourse betwixt God and their souls. That which contents another, will not content a Christian. If the king be absent, men will bow to the empty chair; but if God be absent, an empty duty gives no satisfaction to a gracious spirit. The poorest Christian is found panting after God by sincere desires, and labouring to get up that dead and vain heart to God in duty; though, alas! it is many times but the rolling of the returning stone against the hill: yet he never expects advantage by that duty wherein the Spirit of God is not; nor does he expect the Spirit of God to be where his own spirit is not.

5. Assiduity and constancy in the duties of religion make a notable discovery of the soundness or

rottenness of men's hearts. The hypocrite may show some zeal and forwardness in duties for a time, but he will become weary and give out at length. "Will he delight himself in the Almighty? Will he always call upon God?" No, he will not. If his motions in religion were natural, they would be constant; but they are artificial, and he is moved by external inducements, and so must needs be off and on. He prays himself weary of praying, and hears himself weary of hearing. His heart is not delighted in his duties, and therefore his duties must needs grow stale and dry to him after a while. There are three seasons in which the zeal of a hypocrite may be inflamed in duties:—

First, When some imminent danger threatens him, some smart rod of God is shaken over him: "When he slew them, then they sought him, and returned and inquired early after God." O the goodly words they give, the fair promises they make! and yet all the while "they do but flatter him with their lips, and lie unto him with their tongues;" for let but that danger pass over and the heavens clear up again, and they will restrain prayer and return to their old course again.

Secondly, When the times countenance and favour religion. O what zeal will he then have for God! So in the stony ground, Matth. xiii. 5. the seed sprung up and flourished until the sun of persecution arose, and then it faded away, for it had no depth of earth, no deep solid inward work or principle of grace to maintain it.

Thirdly, When self-ends and designs are accommodated and promoted by these things. This was

the case of Jehu : “ Come, see my zeal :” for what ? For a base self-interest, not for God. How fervently will some men pray, preach, and profess, whilst they sensibly feel the advantages and profits of these duties to their flesh, whilst they are admired and applauded ! These external incentives will put a hypocrite into a hot fit of zeal ; but then, as it is with a man whose colours are raised by the heat of the fire and not by the healthfulness of good constitution, it soon fades and fails again.

But, blessed be God, it is not so with all. The man whose heart is upright with his God, will “ keep judgment and do righteousness at all times.” Whether dangers threaten or not, whether the times favour religion or not, whether his earthly interest be promoted by it or not, he will be holy still. He will not part with his duties when they are stripped naked of external advantages. As the addition of these things to religion did not at first engage him, so the subtraction of them cannot disengage him. If his duty become his reproach, yet Moses will not forsake it, Heb. xi. 26. If he loses his company and is left alone, yet Paul will not flinch from his duty, 2 Tim. iv. 16. If hazard surrounds duty on every side, yet Daniel will not quit it, Dan. vi. 10. They considered these things at first; and counted the cost; and the servants of God still find that religion is rich enough to pay the cost of all that they can lose or suffer for its sake; yea, and that with a hundred-fold reward now in this life. They never had any other design in engaging in religious duties, but to help them to heaven; and if they recover heaven at last, whether the way to it prove better or worse, they

have their design and end; and therefore they will be steadfast, “always abounding in the work of the Lord, as knowing that their labour is not in vain in the Lord.”

6. The humility and self-denial of our hearts in duties, will try what they are as to their integrity and sincerity towards God.

Does a man boast in his own excellencies in prayer, as the Pharisee did? “God, I thank thee, I am not as other men:” which he speaks not in an humble acknowledgment of the grace of God which distinguishes man from man, but in a proud ostentation of his own excellencies. Does a man make his duties his saviours, and trust to them in a vain confidence of their worth and dignity? Surely “his heart, which is thus lifted up within him, is not upright.” But if the heart be upright indeed, it will express its humility as in all other things, so especially in its duties wherein it approaches the great and holy God.

1st, It will manifest its humility in those awful and reverential apprehensions it has of God, as Abraham did: “And now, I, that am but dust and ashes,” says he, “have taken upon me to speak unto God.” The humility of Abraham’s spirit is, in some measure, to be found in all Abraham’s children.

2d, In those low and vile thoughts which they have of themselves and their religious performances. Thus that poor penitent in Luke vii. 38. stood behind Christ weeping. “Yet the dogs eat the crumbs,” said another. “I am more brutish than any man,” said a third. “I abhor myself in dust and ashes,” said a fourth. And as little esteem have they for their performances: “All our righteous- /

nesses are as filthy rags." I deny not but that there is pride and vanity in the most upright ones; but what place soever it finds in their converse with men, it finds little room in their converse with God, or, if it does, they loathe it, and themselves on account of it.

3d, But their humility in duty is especially discovered in renouncing all their duties in point of dependence, and relying entirely upon Christ for righteousness and acceptance. They have special regard to duties in point of obedience, but none at all in point of reliance.

7. The communion and intercourse which is betwixt God and men in duties, discovers what their persons and graces are. And it must needs do so, because what communion soever the hypocrite has with duties, or with saints in duties, he has surely none with God.

None can come nigh to God in duty, but those that are made nigh by reconciliation. All special communion with God is founded in real union with Christ; but "the wicked are estranged from the womb." But now there is real communion betwixt God and his people in duties: "Truly our fellowship, our communion, is with the Father and his Son." God pours forth of his Spirit upon them, and they pour forth their hearts to God. It is sensibly manifested to them when the Lord comes nigh to their souls in duty, and as sensible are they of his retreats and withdrawments from their souls, Cant. iii. 1, 4. They find their hearts open and shut according to the accesses and recesses of the Divine presence. They who never felt any thing of this

nature may call it a fancy, but the Lord's people are abundantly satisfied of the reality thereof. Their very countenance is altered by it, 1 Sam. i. 18.; the sad and cloudy countenance of Hannah cleared up, there was fair weather in her face, as soon as she knew that she had audience and acceptance with her God. I know that all communion with God does not consist in joys and comforts. There is a real communion with God in the mortifying and humbling influences of his Spirit upon men, as well as in the cheering and refreshing influences thereof. I know also that there is a great diversity in the degrees and measures thereof. It is not alike in all Christians, nor with the same Christian at all times. But that real Christians have true and real communion with God in their duties, is a truth as manifest in the spiritual sense and experience of the saints, as their communion is one with another.

8. Growth and improvement of grace in duties distinguishes the sound from the unsound heart.

All the duties in the world will never make a hypocrite more holy, humble, or heavenly than he is; but will, as the watering of a dry stick, sooner rot it, than make it flourishing and fruitful. What was Judas the better for all those heavenly sermons, prayers, and discourses of Christ, which he heard? And what will thy soul be the better for all the duties thou performest weekly and daily, if thy heart be unsound? It is plain from Job xxv. 4. that there must be an implantation into Christ, before there can be an improvement in fruitful obedience. And it is as plain from 1 John ii. 14. that the virtues of ordinances must remain, the efficacy and power that we

sometimes feel under them must abide and remain in the heart afterwards, or we cannot grow and be made fruitful by them. But the false professor is neither rooted in Christ by union with him, nor does or can retain the virtue of ordinances within him; but, like one that views his face in a glass, quickly forgets what manner of man he was. His head indeed may grow, his knowledge may increase, but he has a dead and withered heart. But as the saints have real communion with God in duties, so they make improvements answerable thereunto. There is most certainly a ripening of their graces, a changing or gradual transformation from glory to glory, a springing up to that full stature of the man in Christ: "They that are planted in the house of the Lord, shall flourish in the courts of our God." There is pure and sincere milk in the breasts of ordinances. They grow thereby; they grow more and more judicious, experienced, humble, mortified, and heavenly, by conversing with the Lord so frequently in his appointments.

There is, I confess, a more discernible growth and ripening in some Christians than in others. The faith of some groweth exceedingly, 2 Thess. i. 3.; of others, more slowly, Heb. v. 12.; but yet there are improvements of grace in all upright ones. Habits are more deeply radicated, or fruits of obedience more increased.

Obj. If any upright soul be stumbled at this, as not being able to discern the increase of his graces after all his duties,

Sol. Let such consider that the growth of grace is discerned as the growth of plants is; we perceive

them rather to have grown, than to grow. Compare time past and present, and you may see a growth; but usually our eager desires after more, make us overlook what we have as nothing.

9. The assistance and influences of the Spirit in duties show us what we are.

No vital sanctifying influences can fall upon carnal hearts in duties. The Spirit helps not their infirmities, nor makes intercession for them with groanings which cannot be uttered, as he does for his own people. They have his assistances in the way of common gifts, but not in the way of special grace. He may enable them to preach judiciously, not experimentally; to pray orderly and neatly, not feelingly, believingly, and broken-heartedly; “for as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God.” He never so assists but where he has first sanctified. Carnal men furnish the materials of their duties out of the strength of their parts: a strong memory, a good invention, are the fountains whence they draw. But it is otherwise with souls truly gracious. They have ordinarily a threefold assistance from the Spirit in reference to their duties.

First, Before duties, exciting them to it, making them feel their need of it, like the call of an empty stomach: “Thou saidst, seek my face;” my heart answered, “Thy face, Lord, will I seek.”

Secondly, In their duties, furnishing both matter and affection, as in that text lately cited, Rom. viii. 26. guiding them not only what to ask, but how to ask.

Thirdly, After their duties, helping them not only to suppress the pride and vanity of their spirits, but

also to wait on God for the accomplishment of their desires.

Now, though all these things, wherein the sincerity of our hearts is tried in duties, are found in great variety, as to degrees among saints; yet they are mysteries unknown by experience to other men.



CHAPTER VIII.

On the trial of sincerity and hypocrisy by sufferings on account of religion.

SECT. I.—We are now arrived at the last trial of grace propounded; namely, by sufferings for religion.

Thousands of hypocrites embark themselves in the profession of religion in a calm; but if the wind rises, and the sea rages, and they see that religion will not transport them safely to the cape of their earthly hopes and expectations, they desire to be landed again as soon as may be; for they never intended to ride out a storm for Christ. “He endureth for a while; but when tribulation or persecution ariseth because of the word, by and by he is offended.”

But yet it is not every trial by sufferings that separates gold from dross; and therefore my business will be to show, first, when the fire of sufferings and persecutions is hot and vehement enough to separate them; secondly, why it must needs discover hypocrisy when it is at that height; and, thirdly, what advantages sincere grace has to endure that severe and sharp trial.

SECT. II.—Now the fire of persecution, or sufferings for religion, may be judged intense and high enough to separate gold and dross,—

1. When religion exposes us to imminent hazard of our deepest and dearest interests in this world: such are our liberties, estates, and lives. Then it is a fierce and fiery trial indeed. Sometimes it exposes the liberties of its professors: “The devil shall cast some of you into prison.” Sometimes their estates: “Ye took joyfully the spoiling of your goods.” And sometimes their lives: “They were stoned, they were sawn asunder, they were slain with the sword.” Whilst it goes no higher than some small inconveniencies of life, reputation and sense of honour will hold a false heart; but when it comes to this, few will be found able to endure it, but those who expect to save no more by religion than their souls, and account themselves in good case if they can but save them with the loss of all that is dear to them in this world. Here the false heart hesitates; here it usually jades and falters.

2. The fiery trial is then high, when there remains no visible hopes of deliverance, or outward encouragements to sense, that the scene will alter. When “we see not our signs, there is no more any prophet, nor any that can tell us how long,” as the case was with the church, Psalm lxxiv. 9. then our hands hang down and our hearts faint. Nor is it to be wondered at, when the length of troubles prove so sore a temptation even to the upright, to put forth their hands even to iniquity. If such a temptation shake such men as build on the rock, it must quite overturn those whose foundation is but sand.

3. When a false professor is engaged alone in sufferings, and is singled out from the herd, as a deer to be run down, it is a thousand to one but he quits religion to save himself. Good company will encourage a faint-hearted traveller to jog on a great way; but if he is forsaken by all, as Paul was, with no man to stand by him; if left alone, as Elijah was; what can encourage him to hold out? Indeed, if false professors had the same visible supports these good men had, that the Lord was with them, that would keep them steady; but wanting that encouragement from within, and all shrinking away from without, they quickly tire.

4. When near relations and intimates oppose and tempt us. The prophet speaks of a time "when a man's enemies shall be the men of his own house;" it may be the wife of his bosom. O what a trial is that which Christ mentions in Luke xiv. 26. when we must hate father and mother, wife and children, or quit all claim to Christ and heaven! This is hard work indeed. How hard did that truly noble and renowned Galeacius Carracciolus find this! O what a conflict found he in his bowels! Now Christ and our dearest interests come to meet like two men upon a narrow bridge; if one go forward, the other must go back, and now the predominant interest can no longer be concealed.

5. When powerful temptations are mixed with cruel sufferings; when we are strongly tempted, as well as cruelly persecuted. This blows up the fire to a vehement height. This was the trial of those precious primitive believers: "They were stoned, they were sawn asunder, they were tempted." Here

was life, liberty, and preferment set on one hand, and death, in the most formidable shape, on the other. This cannot but be a great trial to any; but when a cruel death and tender temper meet, then the trial goes especially high indeed.

SECT. III.—And that such sufferings as these will discover the falseness and rottenness of men's hearts, cannot be doubted, if you consider, that this is the fire designed by God for this very use and purpose, to separate the gold from the dross. So you will find it in 1 Pet. iv. 12. "Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you:" the very design and aim of Providence in permitting and ordering them, is to try you. The design of Satan is to destroy you, but God's design is to try you. Upon this account, you find the hour of persecution called "the hour of temptation, or probation;" for then professors are sifted to the very bran, searched to the very bottom. "This is the day that burns as an oven, in which all the proud, and all that do wickedly, shall be as stubble."

1. In that day the predominant interest must appear and be discovered; it can be concealed no longer. "No man can serve two masters." A man may serve many masters, if they all command the same things, or things subordinate to each other; but he cannot serve two masters, if their commands clash and interfere with each other. And such are the commands of Christ and the flesh in a suffering hour. Christ says, "Be thou faithful to the death:" the flesh says, Spare thyself, and secure the comforts of life. Christ says, "He that loveth father or mother, wife or children, lands or inheritance, more

than me, is not worthy of me:" the flesh says, He that will grieve and break the heart of such dear relations, and forsake, when he might keep, such earthly accommodations, is not worthy of them. Thus the two interests come in full opposition;—and now have but patience to wait a little, and you shall discern which is predominant. A dog follows two men, while they both walk one way, and you know not which of the two is his master; stay but a little, till their path separates, and then you shall quickly see who is the master. So is it in this case.

2. In that day sensible supports fail, and all a man's relief comes in by the pure and immediate actings of faith; and were it not for those reliefs, his heart would soon faint and die away under discouragements. "We faint not, whilst we look not at the things which are seen, for they are temporal; but at the things which are not seen, for they are eternal." If we keep not our eye intently fixed upon the invisible and eternal things in the coming world, we shall feel ourselves fainting and dying away under the many troubles and afflictions of this world. "I had fainted," said holy David, "if I had not believed." How then, suppose ye, shall the hypocrite live at such a time, who has no faith to support him, no relief but what comes in through the senses?

3. In that day all mere notions and speculations about religion vanish, and nothing relieves and satisfies the suffering soul, but what it really believes, and what it has satisfying proof and experience of in itself. There are a great many pretty and pleasing notions with which our minds are entertained. Some delight in times of peace, which can do us no service

at all in the day of trouble. And as for speculative unpractical knowledge of the greatest truths in religion, as little service is to be expected from them. Except we have better evidence and security about them, we shall be loath to venture all upon the credit of them. That is a very considerable passage to this purpose in Heb. x. 34. "Ye took joyfully the spoiling of your goods, knowing in yourselves that ye have in heaven a better and more enduring substance." This "knowing in yourselves" is by inward and sensible experience, taste, and feeling, which is abundantly satisfying to the soul; and stands opposed to all that traditional knowledge we receive from others, which, as it leaves the mind fluctuating, so it leaves the heart also dead and comfortless.

4. In that day the root and foundation of a man's faith and hope is tried, and then they who have built upon the sand must needs fail; for every thing is as its foundation. Principles are to us what a root is to a tree, or a foundation to a house; a flaw or grand defect there most assuredly ruins all. This we find to be the very scope of the two famous parables in Luke xiv. 25. and Matt. xiii. 21. Lesser troubles shake but the branches, but these try the very root. If nothing be found there but self-ends, the force of education, and the influence of example—surely, when the winds rise high and beat upon it, they will quickly lay the loftiest professor even with the ground.

And thus you see what a crisis an hour of temptation, the suffering hour, is, and what discoveries of hypocrisy it must needs make; for now the hypocrite, like Orpah, will forsake religion; but sincerity will make the soul cleave to it, as Ruth did to Naomi.

SECT. IV.—What advantages sincerity gives the soul for its establishment and perseverance in suffering times, I shall briefly account for in the following particulars :—

1. Sincere godliness dethrones that idol, the love of this world, in all true Christians ; and this is that which makes men shrink from Christ in a day of suffering. I do not deny but that even believers themselves love the world too much ; but they love it not as their chief good ; it is not their portion or happiness : “ If any man so love the world, the love of the Father is not in him.” How much soever a sincere Christian loves the world, yet still it is in subordination to the love of God, John xxi. 15. Sincerity can consist with no other love of the world : it will not suffer such a cursed plant to grow under its shadow.

Now, what is it, but this inordinate, supreme love of the creature, that makes men forsake Christ in time of temptation ? This was the ruin of that young man in Matt. xix. 22. “ He went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions.” This was the overthrow of Demas : “ He hath forsaken me,” says the apostle, “ having loved this present world.” The love of this world, like sap in green wood, will not suffer you to burn for Christ : get but the heart mortified to the creature, by a discovery of better things in heaven, and it will establish and fix your spirit, so that it shall not be in the power of creatures to shake you off from Christ your foundation.

2. Sincerity knits the soul to Christ, and union with him secures us in the greatest trials. The hypocrite having no union with Christ, can have no

communion with him, nor communications of grace from him ; and so that little stock of his own being quickly spent, I mean natural courage and resolution, and no incomes from Christ, he must needs give up in a short time. But it is with a believer in a day of trouble, as it is with a garrison besieged by land, but free and open to the sea, whence fresh supplies are daily sent in to relieve it. See 2 Cor. i. 5. “As the sufferings of Christ abound in us, so our consolation also aboundeth by Christ ;” we have fresh aids and daily supplies, proportionable to our expenses and decays of strength. So Col. i. 11. “Strengthened with all might in the inner man, according to his glorious power, unto all patience and long-suffering with joyfulness.” And this is the believer’s great advantage by his union with Christ in a day of trial.

3. As sincerity unites the soul to Christ, so it sets the heart on heaven and things eternal. Surely nothing is more conducive to our stability than this in the hour of temptation. This is the most effectual preservative from temptations upon the right hand and upon the left. Moses could cast a kingdom at his heels, despise the riches, pleasures, and honours of Egypt, whilst his eye was fixed upon Him that is invisible, and had respect to the recompense of reward. And it was a brave reply of the forty martyrs to Valence the emperor, tempting them with the preferments and honours of the world—“Why offer ye these trifles to us, when you know how the whole world is contemned by us ?” And as for temptations on the left hand, how little can they move that soul who realizes the glory of the approaching world, and sees

the afflictions and sufferings of this world preparing him for, and hastening him to, the enjoyment of it ! Temptations meet with but cold entertainment from such souls.

4. Sincerity drives but one design, and that is to please and enjoy God ; and what can more establish and fix the soul in the hour of temptation than this ? The reason why the hypocrite is unstable in all his ways, is given us by the apostle : he is “ a double-minded man,” a man of two souls in one body ; as a profane wretch once boasted, that he had one soul for God, and another for any thing. But all the designs of a gracious heart are united in one ; and so the entire stream of his affections runs strong.

It is base by-ends and self-interests, that, like a great many ditches cut out of the bank of a river, draw away the stream out of its proper channel, and make its waters fail. But if the heart be united for God, as the expression is in Psalm lxxxvi. 11. then we may say of such a Christian, as was said of a young Roman, “ What he does is done with all his might.” A man of only one design, puts out all his strength to carry it ; nothing can stand before him.

5. Sincerity brings a man’s will into subjection to the will of God ; and this being done, the greatest danger and difficulty is over with such a man. This is that holy oil which makes the wheels of the soul run nimbly, even in the difficult paths of obedience. Let but a man be once brought to that, “ The will of the Lord be done,” as it is in Acts xxi. 14. to see the highest reason of cheerful obedience in the holy, just, and good will of God, and then all the difficulty is over ; he can suffer quietly what men inflict unjustly.

6. Sincerity takes its measures of present things by the rules of faith and eternity. It goes not by the same reckoning and account that others do, who judge of things by sense, and the respects they have to the present world: "We look not at the things that are seen, but at the things that are not seen;" and this is given as the reason of the apostle's not fainting under present difficulties. So in Rom. viii. 18. "I reckon that the sufferings of the present times are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us." He will not allow himself to undervalue eternal glory, by once mentioning present sufferings, in a way of bemoaning himself for them. A steady eye upon the other world makes us more than conquerors over the troubles of this world.

7. Sincerity alone has all the heavenly aids and assistances to stability and perseverance in suffering times. Upright ones, and such only, have Christ's intercession in heaven for them, Rom. viii. 34.; the Spirit's consolation in all their troubles, 1 Pet. iv. 14.; the beneficial ministry of angels, who are sent forth on their account, Heb. i. 14.; a stock of prayers going up from them all the world over, Eph. vi. 18.; multitudes of precious promises in the Scriptures, for every line, word, and syllable of which the faithfulness of God stands engaged; so that it is impossible such gold can perish in the fire.

And thus of the several ways by which grace is here tried.

CHAPTER IX.

The designs and ends of God in bringing the professors of religion into such various trials of their graces in this world.

SECT. I.—These are some of the ways and methods in which God brings his gold to the touchstone and to the fire, even in this world, before the awful and solemn trial we must come to in the final judgment; and if we desire to be satisfied what the design or end of God in making such probations of his people is, we must conclude, in the general, that he certainly designs his own glory, and his people's advantage and profit by them. If he suffer them to be tried by reproaches, “happy are they, the Spirit of God and of glory resteth on them;” there is their profit: and though his name be evil-spoken of, yet in the meekness of their spirits “he is glorified,” as it is in 1 Pet. iv. 14. “If the scourge slay suddenly, he laugheth at the trial of the innocent:” not their afflictions, but at the effects and blessed issues and results of them; not that it gives them pain, but that it gives them glory. On this account the apostle bids us count it all joy, when we fall into manifold temptations or trials; and still the more trials the more joy; for thereby God will produce such effects as are “more precious than gold that perisheth.” O who can value the comfort that is tasted by the soul upon the trial and discovery of its sincerity, when, after some sore temptation wherein God has helped

us to maintain our integrity, or after some close pinching affliction, wherein we have discovered in ourselves a sweet resignation to, and contentment in, the will of God, a heart cleaving to the Lord, purged and made more spiritual under the rod, we can turn to the Lord, and appeal to him, as the prophet did, “But thou, O Lord, knowest me; thou hast seen me, and tried mine heart towards thee:” I say, who can duly value such an advantage? Who would exchange such a comfort for all the gold and silver in the world? How many trials soever God brings his people under, neither his own glory nor their interest shall suffer any damage by them.

SECT. II.—But more particularly let us bring our thoughts close to the matter before us, and we shall find many great advantages and benefits rising out of these trials of sincerity.

1. Hereby hypocrisy is unmasked and discovered. The vizard is plucked off from the false professor, and his true natural face and complexion shown to the world; and in this there is a great deal of good.

Obj. Good! you will say; where lies it? All the world sees the mischief and sad effects of it; many are stumbled, many are hardened by it. Woe to the world because of offences!

Sol. True, some are prejudiced and hardened by it, so as never to have good thoughts of the ways and people of God more; and this is sad indeed. However, herein God accomplishes his word, and executes his decree; and though these perish, yet others are warned, awakened, and set to search their own hearts more narrowly than ever; and this is good: “Now these were our examples; wherefore let him that thinketh he standeth, take heed lest he fall.”

Hereby also sin is ashamed ; and it is good when sin, that has exposed men to so much shame, shall be itself exposed to shame. This is the just reward of sin : “ This is thy lot, the portion of thy measures from me, saith the Lord ; because thou hast forgotten me, and trusted in falsehood. Therefore will I discover thy skirts upon thy face, that thy shame may appear.” The turning up the skirt is a modest expression of exposing a person to the greatest shame in the day of trial. God, by discovering hypocrisy, shames the hypocrite ; and surely many such discoveries are made of men at this day. We may see sin, that lurked close in the heart before, now laid open before all Israel, and before the sun.

Hereby too the poor self-cozening hypocrite has the greatest opportunity and advantage that ever was before him in all his life, to recover himself out of the snare of the devil. Now all his pretences are gone ; now that which like a shield was advanced against the arrows of reproof and conviction is gone ; now the poor creature stands naked and stripped out of all his pleas, as a fair and open mark to the world and his own conscience ; and happy will it be for him, if now the Lord make conviction to enter into his soul. All these are blessed effects of the discovery of hypocrisy.

2. By these trials integrity is cleared up, and the doubts and fears of many upright and holy ones allayed and quieted, resolved and satisfied.

O what would many a poor Christian give for satisfaction in this great point of sincerity ! How many tears have been shed to God in secret on that account ! How many hours have been spent in examination of his own heart about it ! And still,

jealousies and fears hang upon his heart. He doubts what he may prove at last. Well, says God, let his sincerity then come to the test ; kindle the fire, and cast in my gold. Trials are the highway to assurance. Let my child see that he loves me more than these ; that his heart is upright with me. I will try him by prosperity and adversity, by persecutions and temptations, and he shall see that his heart is better than he suspects it to be. This shall be the day of resolution to his fears and doubts.

The apostle, speaking of heresies, 1 Cor. xi. 19. puts a necessity upon them : “ There must be heresies, that they which are approved may be made manifest.” The same necessity there is, and for the same end, of all other trials of grace, that the lovely, beautiful, sweet face of sincerity may be opened sometimes to the world, to enamour them ; and to the soul in which it is, to satisfy it that it does not personate a Christian, but lives the very life of a Christian, and has the very spirit and principles of a Christian in it.

3. By these trials pride and self-confidence are destroyed and mortified in the saints, as much as by any thing in the world.

We never see what poor weak creatures we are, until we come to the trial. It is said, in Deut. viii. 2. that God led Israel through the desert, “ to prove them and to humble them.” When we are proved, then we are humbled. Those who over-reckon their graces before the trial, see they must come to another account, and take new measures of themselves after they have been upon trial. Ah ! little did I think, says one, that I had so much love for

the world and so little for God, until afflictions tried it. I could not have believed that ever the creature had got so deep into my heart, until Providence either threatened or made a separation, and then I found it. I thought I had been rich in faith, until such a danger befell me, or such a want began to pinch hard, and then I saw how unable I was to trust God for protection or provision. O it is a good thing that our hearts be kept humble and lowly, how rich soever they be in grace!

4. By trials, grace is kept in exercise, and the gracious soul preserved from security and spiritual slothfulness.

Trials are to grace what the tides and continual agitations of the waters are to the sea, or what the racking of wine from the lees is to it. Were it not for our frequent trials and exercises, we should quickly settle upon the lees, and our duties would be, as God complains of Ephraim, Hos. iv. 18. like sour or dead drink, flat and spiritless. "Moab hath been at ease from his youth, and hath settled on his lees, and hath not been emptied from vessel to vessel; neither hath he gone into captivity; therefore his taste remained in him, and his scent is not changed." Much after this rate it would be with our hearts, did not the Lord frequently try and exercise them. Let the best man be without some trial or other but a few months, and you may find the want of it in his prayers and conferences quickly. O what formality will be found in them! And is it for the honour of God, or profit of his people, that it should be so? No, the Lord knows it is not; but how shall their spirits be brought to their former zealous, heavenly

temper again? Why, says the Lord, they must be put into the furnace again: "I will melt them and try them; for how shall I do for the daughter of my people?" I love them too well to lose them for want of a rod. Alas! if I should suffer things to go on at this rate, what will become of them in a little time? What delight can I take in their duties, when the faith, fervour, humility, and holy seriousness of their spirits are wanting in them? I will therefore "refine them as silver is refined, and try them as gold is tried, and they shall call upon my name, and I will hear them; and I will say, It is my people; and they shall say, The Lord is my God." And thus the Lord chides himself friend again with his people: thus he recovers them to their true temper; and thus his visitations preserve their spirits. And when the Lord sees these sweet effects of his trial upon them, it greatly pleases him. O now, says God, I like it. This providence has done them good; this rod was well bestowed; the letting loose of this temptation or that corruption upon them has made them find their knees again. Now I hear the voice of my child again.

Beloved, this is a blessed fruit and effect of our frequent trials; and how ungrateful soever they are to flesh and blood, which desired ease, and is loath to be disturbed, yet they are necessary to the preservation of our spirits.

5. By the trial of our graces Satan is defeated, and his accusations of the saints found to be mere slanders.

It is a very common thing with the devil and wicked men, to accuse the people of God of hypo-

crisy, and to tell the world they are not the men and women they are taken to be; and that if their inside were but turned out by some thorough trial or deep search, it would appear that religion did not indeed live in their souls, as they pretend, but that they only act a part, and personate heavenly and mortified persons upon the public stage of profession. Thus the accuser of the brethren suggests the hypocrisy of Job: "Put forth thine hand now, and touch his bone and his flesh, and he will curse thee to thy face." Well might Job serve thee whilst thou hast been so bountiful a master to him; he hath been well rewarded for all the service he hath done thee; but if thou stop the current of his prosperity, thou shalt see how quickly he will stop the course of his duty; a few lashes from thy hand will make him curse thee to thy face. But O what shame and disappointment was it to that envious spirit, what a vindication of Job's integrity when, under the greatest trials of his faith and patience, he still held fast his integrity, and showed himself as great a pattern of patience under the cross, as he had been of piety in the days of his greatest prosperity! Satan gets nothing by bringing forth the saints upon the stage, to be made a spectacle to angels and men, 1 Cor. iv. 9.

6. The frequent trials of grace exhibit a full and living testimony against the atheism of the world.

These prove beyond all words or arguments that religion is no fancy, but the greatest reality in the world. Men would make religion but a fancy, and the zeal of its professors but the intemperate heat of some crazy brains, over-heated with a fond notion. They who never felt the real influences of religion

upon their own souls, will not believe that others feel them. Serious piety is become a ludicrous subject, with which the wanton wits of this atheistical world sport themselves. But behold the wisdom and goodness of God, exhibiting to the world undeniable testimonies of the truth of religion, as often as the sincere professors thereof are brought to the test by afflictions from the hand of God, or persecution from the hands of men. Lo ! “here is the faith and patience of the saints ;” here is their courage, meekness, and self-denial, shining as gold in the fire. They have the real proofs of it before their eyes. Instead of casting them into hell, and convincing them by eternal fire, he is pleased to cast his own people into the fire of affliction, that they who scoff at them may be convinced at an easier and cheaper rate. It is no new thing to see the enemies of religion brought over to embrace it, by the constancy and faithfulness of the saints in their trials and sufferings for it. God grant that the atheism of this present generation do not occasion a more fiery trial to the people of God in it, than they have yet suffered !

CHAPTER X.

Showing that that grace only is to be reckoned sincere and real, which can endure those trials which God appoints or permits for the discovery of it.

SECT. I.—Before I offer you the proofs and evidences of this truth, it will be necessary to prevent

some mistakes that may be occasioned by misunderstanding it.

Caution 1. And, in the first place, we are not to think assurance of our sincerity impossible to be had in this life, because as long as we live here we are in a state of trial; and how many trials soever have been made upon us already, yet still there are more to come; and we know not what we shall prove in future trials, though God has kept us upright in former trials. No, this is none of my meaning; nor does such a conclusion necessarily follow this assertion; for a Christian who has rightly closed with Christ at first, and been faithful in the duties of active and passive obedience hitherto, may be assured, on good grounds, of a victory before he come to the fire of his remaining trials. So was the Apostle: “Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? Nay, in all these we are more than conquerors, through him that hath loved us.” Here is an assured triumph before the combat. So Job xxiii. 10. “But he knoweth the way that I take: when he hath tried me, I shall come forth as gold.” He appeals to God for the sincerity of his heart so far as he had hitherto gone in the way of religion; and thence concludes, that whatever trials God should bring him to, in time to come, he should “come forth as gold,” that is, he should not lose one grain by the fire. And this confidence of a gracious soul is built not only upon experience gained in former trials, but upon faith in the power, promises, and faithfulness of God, which are engaged for him in the covenant of grace, to keep

him in the greatest dangers that befall him in this world. He believes that the power of God is able to make him stand, though he has no power nor might in himself to overcome the least temptation: "You are kept," as in a garrison, "by the power of God through faith unto salvation." When Christ has once taken possession of the soul by his Spirit, he fortifies it by his power, as in a garrison; that, using the means, it may be surprised or betrayed no more into the enemy's hand, so as finally to be lost.

He builds this confidence also upon the promises of God, which are his security in future dangers. And how are all the pages of the Bible bespangled with such promises, as the firmament is with bright and glorious stars! Such are these of the first magnitude: "Christ shall confirm you to the end, that you may be blameless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. God is faithful, by whom ye are called into the fellowship of his Son Jesus Christ our Lord." And no less satisfying and sweet is that in Jer. xxxii. 40. "And I will make an everlasting covenant with them, that I will not turn away from them to do them good; but I will put my fear in their hearts, that they shall not depart from me." And of the same nature is that also in John x. 27, 28. "My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me, and I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand." If there be any hypocrite in sheep's clothing, he has no part nor lot in this promise; but it secures the whole flock of Christ, great and small, against all danger.

He builds his assurance also upon the faithfulness

of God, which stands engaged to make good every line, word, and syllable of his promises to his people. So we find in 1 Cor. x. 13. "There hath no temptation taken you, but such as is common to man; but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it:" and in 2 Thess. iii. 3. "But the Lord is faithful, who shall establish you, and keep you from evil."

Add to this the constant prevalent intercession of Christ in heaven for his people, in all their trials; and you will see that a sincere Christian needs not to deny himself the joy and comfort of his assurance, upon the account and supposition of his future trials.

SECT. II.—*Caution 2.* Nor do we here suppose in this assertion, that inherent grace in the saints has a sufficiency of ability in itself to endure the greatest and severest trials that can befall it in this world. It is certain that it shall be carried safely through all, but not in its own strength and ability.

This is a true observation of the learned Gerson, "The most perfect creature left to itself will fall into ruin." This was exemplified in the angels that fell, and in Adam, though in a perfect state. Divine preservation is the prop which supports the best creatures from ruin. Grace itself is but a creature, and therefore a dependent being. It is but a stream, depending upon the supply of the fountain. If the fountain let not forth itself, what becomes of the stream? That is a true and judicious observation of the learned Dr. Ames, "The perseverance of believers, or the immutability of their condition, if we

view the whole ground and reason of it, is not wholly from within or wholly from without itself; but partly from the nature of the spiritual life which flows from Christ unto them, and partly from the keeping, protection, and direction of God." That protection is always afforded to this life of grace; and this life of grace always needs that protection. The best of men are but men at best. It was not Peter's grace and resolution that kept him, but Christ's care of him and intercession for him: "Be strong in the Lord," says the apostle, "and in the power of his might." "Without me," says Christ, "ye can do nothing."

Neither of these is that which I have before me to prove; but this is that which I aim at, that such seeming grace as was never yet brought to the trial, nor will be able to bear the trial when God shall bring it thereto, must not pass for current as too frequently it does among us. Such grace will neither comfort us now nor save us hereafter.

SECT. III.—First, Great numbers of persons in the professing world are deceived and destroyed by trusting to seeming and untried grace.

This was the miserable condition of those Laodicean professors in the text: they reckoned themselves rich, but were really poor. All is not gold that glitters. Their supposed gold was never tried in the fire. If a man's whole estate lay in some precious stone, suppose a rich diamond, how is he concerned to have it thoroughly tried, to see whether it will bear a smart stroke with a hammer, or fly like a Bristol diamond under it! All that you are worth lies in the truth and sincerity of your grace; and till

that be tried, you know not whether you are worth any thing or nothing.

Reader, there are two sad sights in the world, which cannot but deeply affect every upright heart: one is, to see so many thousands of rational and ingenuous men in the Romish church, by an implicit faith in their guides, venturing their souls upon their bare word; never searching the Scriptures with their own eyes, but wholly trusting to the infallibility of a pope or a council; when, in the mean time, they would fear to take their word for a sum of money, without some further security. It is amazing to behold the soul-destroying, easy credulity of those men; but this is a stroke of madness and spiritual infatuation judicially inflicted upon them, that the judgment which is written might be fulfilled in them, “God shall send them strong delusion, that they should believe a lie.” And yet more amazing is that stroke of God upon multitudes of vain and formal professors even in the reformed Protestant churches, where no man is restrained from searching the Scriptures; nay, where men are so frequently and earnestly pressed, from Sabbath to Sabbath, to examine themselves and prove their own work, that yet so many are content to leave all at hazard, and, without any more ado or farther search in the matter, credit the report of their own deceitful hearts, and take all for granted, without due trial or examination of the matter. Surely, no one thing sends down more souls daily to hell out of the professing world, than this does. The five foolish virgins, the unprincipled professors in the reformed churches, perished this way. They took it for granted that all was well, because they had lamps

of profession as well as others; and saw not the cheat till the cry was heard at midnight, and their unfurnished lamps went out, Matt. xxv.

2. The promises of salvation are made to tried grace, and such only as will endure the trial. Thus, "Blessed is the man that endureth temptation; for when he is tried, he shall receive the crown of life, which God hath promised to them that love him." We must be first tried, and then crowned. "If a man strive for the mastery, yet is he not crowned, except he strive lawfully." The apostle manifestly alludes to the Roman games, to which there were judges appointed to see that no foul play was offered contrary to the laws of wrestling; and where it was found, the crown was denied them. Not to him that sets forth in the morning with resolution and gallantry, but to him that holds out till the evening of his life, is the promise made: "He that endureth to the end shall be saved." So Rom. ii. 7. "To them who by patient continuance in well-doing seek for glory, and honour, and immortality, eternal life." And once more: "We are made partakers of Christ, if we hold the beginning of our confidence steadfast unto the end." So that if you should endure some few slighter troubles, and faint at last, give out when a closer trial befalls you, all your labours and sufferings are in vain. Sincerity and final perseverance are the conditions of all special promises.

3. Every man's graces and duties must be tried and weighed by God in the great day; and if they cannot endure these lesser trials to which God exposes them now, how will they endure that severe and exact trial to which he will bring them then?

No man can search his own heart with that exactness in this world, as that with which God will search it in the world to come. I may say in this case to you, as the Lord spake to Jeremiah: "If thou hast run with the footmen, and they have wearied thee, then how canst thou contend with horses? And if in the land of peace, wherein thou trustedst, they have wearied thee, then how wilt thou do in the swelling of Jordan?" This was spoken to encourage the prophet to constancy in his work: as if the Lord had said, O Jeremy, do the strivings of the men of Anathoth, thine own town, dishearten thee? Pluck up thy spirits, and faint not. There are harder trials than these that thou must undergo at Jerusalem. These are no more to what is coming, than the running with footmen is to the contending with horses, or the passing a small rivulet to the swellings of Jordan. To apply this:—if our graces and duties cannot bear these lighter trials; if a little lift of prosperity, or lighter stroke of adversity, discover so much falseness, rottenness, pride, and selfishness in the heart; if we cannot resist the motions of corruption, but yield ourselves to obey sin in the lusts of it; if we can neither keep our hearts with God in duties, nor mourn for our wanderings from him; if a few scoffs from wicked tongues, or trials of persecution from the hands of men, will cause us to faint in the way, and turn back from following the Lord, what shall we do when he comes whose "fan is in his hand, and who will thoroughly purge his floor," who will try every man's work as by fire, search the secrets of all hearts? Surely we can take little comfort in that which is so unable to bear the severe trials of

that day, that it cannot stand before the slighter trials of this day.

4. True grace is willing to be tried, and nothing is more desirable to an upright soul, than to know its own condition. If, therefore, we shun the trial, and are loath to search ourselves, or be searched by the Lord, our condition is suspicious, and we can take little comfort in it. It was David's earnest desire that God would thoroughly search his heart and reins, and see if there were any way of wickedness in him, Psal. cxxxix. 23. False grace is shy of God's eye; it cares not to be examined; but this is the delight of sincere ones: "Every one that doeth evil hateth the light, lest his deeds should be re-proved; but he that doeth truth, cometh to the light, that his deeds may be made manifest, that they are wrought in God." The reason is plain why hypocrisy cannot endure to come to the touchstone and test; for hypocrites, having a secret consciousness of their own guilt and unsoundness, know that by this means their vain confidence would quickly be confuted, and all their reputation for religion blasted. But O if men dare not stand before the word, as it is now opened and applied by ministers, how will they stand when it shall be opened and applied in another manner by Jesus Christ?

O professor, if thy condition be good, thy heart right, thou wilt desire to know the very worst of it thyself; and when thou hast made the deepest search thou canst, thou wilt still fear thou hast not been severe enough and impartial enough to thyself. Nothing will give thee more content than when thou feelest the word dividing thy soul and spirit, thy

joints and marrow. Nothing so much comforts thee under or after an affliction, as the discovery it has made of thy heart. Thou wilt seem to feel with what affection those words came from the prophet's lips: "But thou, O Lord, knowest me; thou hast seen me, and tried mine heart toward thee." O what a refreshing sweetness will stream through thy heart, and all the powers of thy soul, when thou canst make the like appeal to God with like sincerity! And certainly, without such a disposition of spirit towards the trial of our graces, we can have little evidence of the truth of them.



CHAPTER XI.

Various practical instructive Inferences, with a serious Exhortation to Self-trial and thorough Examination.

SECT. I.—*Infer.* 1. Are there such variety of trials appointed to examine the sincerity of men's graces? How great a vanity then is hypocrisy! and to how little purpose do men endeavour to conceal and hide it! We say, Murder will out; and we may as confidently affirm, Hypocrisy will out. When Rebekah had laid the plot to disguise her son Jacob, and, by personating his brother, to get the blessing, Jacob thus objects against it: "My father peradventure will feel me, and I shall seem to him as a deceiver; and I shall bring a curse upon me, and not a blessing." As if he should say, But what if my father detect

the cheat? How then shall I look him in the face? How shall I escape a curse? After the same manner every upright soul scares itself from the way of hypocrisy. If I dissemble, and pretend to be what I am not, my Father will find me out. There is no darkness nor shadow of death that can conceal the hypocrite; but out it will come at last, let him use all the art he can to hide it. Oftentimes God discovers him by the trials he appoints in this world; and men in that day shall “return, and discern between the righteous and the wicked; between him that serveth God, and him that serveth him not.” But if he make a hard shift to get by a private way to hell, carrying this comfort with him to the last step, that nobody knows or thinks he is gone thither; yet there will be a day when God will strip him naked before the great assembly of angels and men, and all shall point at him, and say, “Lo! this is the man that made not God his hope.” This is he that wore a garment of profession to deceive; but God has now stript him out of it, and all men see what he is: “for there is nothing covered, that shall not be revealed; and hid, that shall not be known.” And the apostle assures us, in 1 Tim. v. 25. that “they that are otherwise cannot be hid.” If men’s works be not good, it is impossible they should be hid long. A gilded piece of brass may pass from hand to hand a little while, but the touchstone will discover the base metal; and if that does not, the fire will.

O sinners, away with your hypocrisy! Be honest, sincere, plain, and hearty in religion. If not, confusion of face shall be your recompense from the Lord. That is what you will get by it.

Infer. 2. Are there such trials appointed and permitted by the Lord for the discovery of his people's sincerity in this world? Then let none of God's people expect a quiet station in this world. Certainly you will meet with no rest here. You must pass out of one fire into another. And it is a merciful condescension of the Lord to poor creatures thus to concern himself for their safety and benefit. "What is man, that thou shouldst magnify him? and that thou shouldst set thine heart upon him? and that thou shouldst visit him every morning, and try him every moment?" O it is a great deal of honour put upon a poor worm, when God will every moment try him and visit him! It argues the great esteem the goldsmith has of his gold, when he will sit by the furnace himself, and order the fire with his own hand; when he pries so often and so curiously into the fining-pot, to see that none of the precious metal upon which he has set his heart be lost.

Think it not then debasing to you to be so often exposed to trials. If God did not value you highly, he would not try you so frequently. What would become of you, if your condition here should be more settled and quiet than now it is? I believe you find dross enough in your hearts after all the fires into which God has cast you. Surely there is filth enough in the best of God's people, to require all the trouble they have yet met with, and perhaps a great deal more. We fancy it a brave life to live at ease; and, if we meet with longer respites and intervals of trial than usual, we are apt to say, "We shall never be moved;" or, "We shall die in our nest," as it is in Job xxix. 18.; our hard and difficult days are

over ; but woe to us if God should give us the desire of our hearts in this ! See what is the temper of those men's spirits who meet with no changes : " Because they have no changes, therefore they fear not God." O it is better to be preserved sweet in brine, than to rot in honey !

Infer. 3. Let none boast in a carnal confidence of their own strength and stability. You are in a state of trial. Hitherto God has kept you upright in all your trials. Bless God, but boast not. You are but feathers in the wind of temptation, if God leave you to yourselves. Peter told Christ—and doubtless he spoke no more than he honestly meant—" Though I should die with thee, yet will I not deny thee;" and you know what he did when the hour of his trial came. Angels left to themselves have fallen. It is better to be an humble worm than a proud angel.

Ah ! how many hypocrites will this professing age show, if once God bring us to the fiery trial ! " Let him that thinketh he standeth, take heed lest he fall." " Ye have not yet resisted unto blood, striving against sin. None stand upon firmer ground than those who see nothing in themselves to stand upon. He who leans upon his own arm, usually benumbs it, and makes it useless.

Infer. 4. Does God kindle so many fires in Sion, and set his furnaces in Jerusalem, to discover and separate the dross from the gold ? How contrary are those men to God, that allow, yea, and prize the dross of hypocrisy which God hates, and stick not to make the holy God a patronizer and countenancer of it in the hearts and lives of men !

It is amazing to read what popish pens have im-

prudently written about this matter. Sylvester puts the question, "Whether it be a sin to make a false show of sanctity?"—and answers it thus: "If it be for the honour of God, and profit of others, it is no sin?" Nay, they have a reverence for hypocrisy, as a holy art. Vicentius spends a whole chapter in commendation of the hypocrisy of St. Dominio, and entitles it, "Of the holy hypocrisy of that saint;" reckoning it among his commendations, that he had the art of dissembling. And another goes still farther. "A religious person," says he, "who feigns himself to have more holiness than he has, that others may be edified, sins not, but rather merits." Blush, O heavens, that ever such factors for hell should open and vend such ware as this in the public market, and invite the world to hypocrisy, as that which makes for the glory of God, the edification of men, and a work meritorious in the hypocrite himself. This is the doctrine of devils indeed!

Infer. 5. If it be so that all grace must come to the test, and be tried as gold in the fire, even in this world, how are all men concerned to lay a solid foundation at first, and thoroughly deliberate the terms upon which they close with Christ, and engage in the profession of his name!

"Which of you," says Christ, "intending to build a tower, sitteth not down first, and counteth the cost?" If some men had sat down at first, and pondered the conditions and terms of Christ, they had not sat down now discouraged, and tired in the way. The Apostle Paul went to work at another rate. He accounted all but dung and dross for Christ, and was of the same mind when the actual trial came; for then he tells us,

that “ he counted not his life dear unto him.” And the Apostle Peter admonishes believers “ not to think it strange concerning the fiery trial which was to try them.” Let none of these things be surprisals to you ; you are told before-hand what ye must trust to : every Christian must be a martyr, at least in the disposition and resolution of his heart.

O that men would balance the advantages and disadvantages of religion, and thoroughly ponder the matter in their deepest thoughts ! To the test you must come. The rain will fall, and the storm beat upon your buildings. Look carefully therefore to the foundations.

Infer. 6. Learn from this point the unavoidable-ness of scandals and offences in the way of religion ; for if there be a necessity of trial, there is also a necessity of scandal. “ It must needs be that offences come.” Why must it needs be ? The reason is evident : all must come to the trial, and all are not able to bear it. Our Lord tells us, Matt. xxiv. 8—10. of a day of great straits and perplexity coming : “ And then,” says he, “ shall many be offended.” The day of trial is the day of scandal. By these offences some are put to search themselves, and some begin censuring all others ; but the holy God brings about his end both ways, in them that are saved and in them that perish.

SECT. II.—Well then, if it be so that all must go into the furnace, let every man try his own work. Examine yourselves, professors ; search your hearts, commune with your reins. Nothing more concerns you in all the world than this does. O that you would be more in your closets, and oftener upon

your knees! O that you would look into the Bible, then into your hearts, and then to God, saying with David, "Search me, O God, and know my heart; try me and know my thoughts, and see if there be any wicked way in me!" Never did religion thrive in the world since men's heads have been so overheated with notions and controversies, and their hearts so sensibly cooled in their closet-work. I have elsewhere, in my 'Saint Indeed,' more largely pressed this duty upon the professors of this generation, and thither shall refer the reader for the present, to see the necessity and importance of this work. Here I shall only urge the duty of self-trial by some pressing motives and awakening considerations.

Motive 1. And the first shall be the exceeding difficulty of this work.

Difficulty in some cases may be a discouragement; but where the matter is of absolute necessity, as it is here, nothing excites more to diligence. "Strive," says our Lord, "to enter in at the strait gate; for many will seek to enter in, and shall not be able." A double difficulty is found attending this work of self-trial. Difficulty in bringing the heart to it, and difficulty in the right and successful management of it. Who finds it not hard to persuade his heart to such work as this! Nature declines it, flesh and blood relish it not. It is one of the greatest severities in religion. It is no easy thing to bring a man and his own heart together. It is in this case as in the study of geography: we are more inquisitive to know, and more delighted when we discover, the rarities of foreign countries and strange things in the remote parts of the world, than we are with those of

our own native country. I fear there are many professors of religion who can spend day after day in hearing, and love to be disputing fruitless controversies, who never spend one day in searching what influence all those sermons they have heard have had upon their hearts, or in rightly stating and determining that great controversy, in whose right and possession their souls are, and which way they shall go as soon as God has divided them from their mortal bodies; yea, I doubt, many sinful hours are spent in prying into, reporting, and censuring the failings of others, and not one hour faithfully employed in judging their own hearts before the Lord. Oh! men had rather be about any work than this. There is no pleasure in it to the flesh.

And yet how difficult soever it be to bring our hearts to the work, it is certainly much more difficult to manage it successfully, and bring the great question of our sincerity to a clear result and issue. O how many upright hearts have applied closely to this work many a year, and lifted up many a cry to Heaven, and shed many secret and undissembled tears about it, and yet are still in the dark, and their minds greatly perplexed, and filled with fear about it! What would they not do, what would they not suffer, what pleasant enjoyment would they not gladly part with, to arrive at the desire of their souls, the full assurance of their sincerity? It was the saying of a pious woman, "I have borne seven children, and they have cost me as dear as ever children cost a mother; yet would I be content to endure all that sorrow over again, to be assured of the love of God to my soul."

Motive 2. And as the work is full of difficulty, so the discovery of your sincerity will be full of sweetness and joy unspeakable. It will never repent you that you have prayed and mourned, that you have trembled and feared, that you have searched and tried; nay, it will never repent you, that God has tried you by thousands of sharp afflictions and deep sufferings, if, after all, your sincerity may be fully cleared up to the satisfaction of your souls: for in the same day in which your sincerity shall be cleared, your title to Christ will be made as clear to your souls as your sincerity is. You may then go to the promises boldly, and take your own Christ into the arms of your faith, and say, “My beloved is mine, and I am his!” Yea, you may be confident, that it shall be well with you in the judgment of the great day, for “God will not cast away the upright man.” If the word clears you now, it cannot condemn you then.

O what an ease it is to the soul, when the fears and doubts that hang about it, are gone! when a man sees what he is, and what he has in Christ and the promises! what he has to do, even to spend the time betwixt this and heaven in admiring the grace of God that has delivered him from the ruining mistakes and miscarriages, by which so great a part of the professing world are lost to all eternity!

Motive 3. The deep concernment of your souls in the matter to be tried, should awaken you to the utmost diligence about it.

The trials of men for their life, at human bars, is but a trifle to this. It is your eternal happiness that stands or falls with your sincerity. It is said in the

trial of opinions, that if a man build hay or stubble upon the foundation, he shall suffer loss; yet he himself may be saved. But if hypocrisy be in the foundation, there is no such relief; there is no possibility of salvation in that case.

Ah, reader! thou must be cast for ever according to the integrity or hypocrisy of thy heart with God. Summon in, then, all the powers of thy soul: bring thy thoughts, as closely as it is possible to bring them, to this matter. If there be any subject of consideration able to drink up the spirits of a man, here it is. Never was time put up to a higher improvement, never were thoughts spent upon a more important business, than this is. Happy is the man who rescues the years, months, days, yea, the very moments of his life from other employments to consecrate them to this solemn, awful, and most important business!

Motive 4. How evidential will it be of your sincerity, when you are willing to come to the trial of your own hearts!

Suppose your doubts and fears should in some degree remain with you, yet in this you may take some comfort, that if hypocrisy be in your heart, it is not there by consent. You are not loath to rise and come to trial, because, like Rachel, you sit upon your idols. Certainly it is a good sign that thy heart is right, when it is filled with so much fear lest it should be false. You know all the disciples said, "Master, is it I?" before Judas, who was the traitor, spake a word. "Last of all, Judas said, Is it I?" Our willingness to be tried is a good sign that the desire of our soul is to be right with God.

Motive 5. Conclude it to be your great advantage to be thoroughly tried, whatever you may be found to be in the trial.

If you are found sincere, you are richly rewarded for all your pains and labour. Never did that man repent of digging and toiling, who, after all, hit upon the rich vein that he digged for. What is a vein of gold to a vein of sincerity? If upon search you find the contrary, a false, hypocritical, unsound heart, yet in that very sad discovery you meet with the greatest advantage that ever you had in your lives for salvation. This discovery is your great advantage; for now your vain confidence being overturned, and your ungrounded hopes destroyed, you lie open to the stroke of a deep and effectual conviction of your sin and misery, which is the introductive mercy to all the other mercies to your souls; and surely till you come to that, to give up your false hopes and quit your vain pretensions, there is no hope of you. Christ told the Pharisees, that publicans and harlots would into enter the kingdom of heaven before them. Publicans were the worst sort of men, and harlots the worst sort of women, and yet they stood in a fairer way for heaven than the hypocritical Pharisees, because conviction had easier access to their consciences: they had not those defences and pleas of duty and strictness to ward off the word that the self-cozening Pharisees had.

I may say, of your vain and groundless hopes, as Christ, in another sense, said to the officers that came to seize him in the garden, “If you seek me, let these go their way.” So it is here; if you expect Christ and salvation by him, let your vain confidences

go their way. Away with your masks and vizards, if ever you expect to see Christ. O it is your happiness to have all these things stript off and your nakedness and poverty discovered, that you may be rich, as the text speaks.

Motive 6. Consider how near the day of death and judgment approaches you.

O these are searching days wherein you cannot be hid. Will your consciences, think you, be put off in a dying day as easily as they are now? No, you know they will not.

I have heard of a good man that consumed not only the greatest part of the day, but a very considerable part of the night also in prayer, to the great weakening of his body; and being asked by a relation why he did so, and urged to favour himself, he returned this answer, "Oh I must die! I must die!" plainly intimating, that so great is the concernment of dying in a clear assured condition, that it is richly worth the expense of all our time and strength to secure it.

You know also that *after death is the judgment*. You are hastening to the judgment of the great and terrible God. Death will put you into his balance to be weighed exactly; and what can give the soul a louder call to search itself with all diligence, whilst it stands at the door of eternity, and its turn is not yet come to go before that awful tribunal? O that these considerations may have force upon our hearts!

CHAPTER XII.

Various helps for the clearing of Sincerity, and discovery of Hypocrisy.

SECT. I.—You see of what importance the duty of self-examination is, and how many things put a necessity and a solemnity upon that work. Now, in the close of all, I would offer you some helps for the due management thereof, that is, as far as I can carry it. The Lord persuade your hearts to the diligent and faithful application and use of them. The general rules to clear sincerity are these that follow:—

Rule 1. We must not presently conclude that we are in the state of hypocrisy, because we find some workings of it, and tendencies to it, in our spirits. The best gold has some dross and alloy in it. Hypocrisy is a weed naturally springing in all ground: the best heart is not perfectly clear or free of it. It may be that we are stumbled, when we feel some workings of this disease in ourselves, and looking into such Scriptures as these: “Behold an Israelite indeed, in whom is no guile.”—“Blessed is the man unto whom the Lord imputeth not iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no guile.” This, I say, may stumble some upright soul, not understanding in what a qualified sense these Scriptures are to be understood; for by a spirit without guile, is not to be understood a person absolutely free from all deceitfulness and falseness of heart. This was the sole prerogative of the Lord Jesus, who was separated from

sinners, in whose mouth was no guile found, in whom the prince of this world, in all his trials and attempts upon him, found nothing: but we must understand it of reigning and allowed hypocrisy. There is no such guile as this in any of the saints. Distinguish the presence from the predominance of hypocrisy, and the doubt is resolved.

Rule 2. Every true ground of humiliation for sin is not a sufficient ground for doubting and questioning our state and condition.

There are many more things to humble us upon the account of our infirmity, than there are to stumble us upon the account of our integrity. It is the sin and affliction of some good souls to call their condition in question upon every slip and failing in the course of their obedience. This is the way to debar ourselves from all the peace and comfort of the Christian life. We find that Joseph was once minded to put away Mary his espoused wife, not knowing that the holy thing which was conceived in her was by the Holy Ghost. It is the sin of hypocrites to take brass for gold, and the folly of saints to call their gold brass. Be as severe to yourselves as you will, provided always you be just. "There is that maketh himself rich, yet hath nothing; there is that maketh himself poor, yet hath great riches." Hiram called the cities Solomon gave him, Cabul, that is, Dirty, for they pleased him not, 1 Kings ix. 13. It is but an ill requital, an ungrateful return to God for the best of mercies, to undervalue them in our hearts, and be ready upon all occasions to put them away as worth nothing.

Rule 3. A stronger propensity in our nature, and

more frequent incidence in our practice, to one sin than another, do not presently infer our hypocrisy, and the unsoundness of our hearts in religion. It is true, every hypocrite has some way of wickedness; some iniquity that he delights in, and rolls as a sweet morsel under his tongue; some lust that he is not willing to part with, nor can endure that the knife of mortification should touch; and this undoubtedly argues the insincerity and rottenness of his heart. And it is true also that the nature and constitution of the most sanctified man inclines him rather to one sin than to another, though he allow himself in none; yea, though he set himself more watchfully against that sin than any other, yet he may still have more trouble and vexation, more temptation and defilement from it, than from any other. As “every man has his proper gift, one after this manner, and another after that,” as the apostle speaks, so every man has his proper sin also, one after this manner, and another after that. For it is with original sin as it is with the juice or sap of the earth, which, though it is the common matter of all kinds of fruit, yet it is specified according to the different sorts of plants and seeds which it nourishes; in one it becomes an apple, in another a cherry. Just so it is in original corruption, which is turned into this or that temptation or sin, according to this or that constitution or employment it finds us in. In one it is passion, in another lust, in a third covetousness, in a fourth levity, and so on. Now, I say, the frequent assaults of this sin—provided we indulge it not, but, by setting double guard, labour to keep ourselves from our own iniquity, as David did, Psalm xviii. 23—will not infer the hypocrisy of our hearts.

Rule 4. A greater backwardness and indisposedness to one duty rather than another, does not conclude the heart to be unsound and false with God, provided we do not inwardly dislike and disapprove any duty of religion, or except against it in our agreement with Christ, but that it riseth merely from the present weakness and distemper we labour under.

There are some duties in religion, as suffering for Christ, bearing sharp reproofs for sin, to which even an upright man, under a present distemper, may find a great deal of backwardness and loathness; yet still he consents to the law that it is good, is troubled that he cannot comply more cheerfully with his duty, and desires to stand complete in the will of God. Perfection is his aim, and imperfections are his sorrows.

Some Christians have much ado to bring their hearts to fixed, solemn meditation; their hearts fly off from it; but this is their burden, that it should be so with them. True, it is a very dangerous sign of hypocrisy, when a man's zeal runs out in one channel of obedience only, and he has not respect to all God's commandments; as physicians observe, that the heat of one part of the body, when all the rest is cold, is symptomatical, and argues an ill habit: but whilst the soul heartily approves all the will of God, and sincerely desires to come up to it, and mourns for its backwardness and deadness to this or that duty, and this deadness is not fixed, but occasional, under some present indisposition out of which the soul rises in the same degrees as sanctification rises in him, and the Lord comes in with renewed strength upon him; this, I say, may consist, and is very ordinarily found to be the case of upright-hearted ones.

Rule 5. The glances of the eye at self-ends in duties, whilst self is not the weight that moves the wheels or the principal end and design we aim at, and whilst those glances are corrected and mourned for, do not conclude the heart to be unsound and hypocritical in religion.

Even among the most deeply sanctified, few can keep their eyes so steady and fixed with pure and unmixed respects to the glory of God, but that there will be, alas ! too frequently, some by-ends insinuating and creeping into the heart. These, like the fowls, seize upon the sacrifice, let the soul take what pains it can to drive them away. It is well that our High Priest bears the iniquities of our holy things for us. Peter had too much regard to the pleasing of men, and did not walk with that uprightness towards the Gentile Christians and the believing Jews, in the matter of liberty, as became him ; for which, as Paul said, he ought to be blamed, and he did blame him ; but yet such a failing as that in the end of his duty did not condemn him. In public performances there may be too much vanity, in works of charity too much ostentation : these are all workings of hypocrisy in us, and matters of humiliation to us ; but whilst they are disallowed, corrected, and mourned over, they are consistent with integrity.

Rule 6. The doubts and fears that hang upon and perplex our spirits about the hypocrisy of our hearts, do not conclude that therefore we are what we fear ourselves to be.

God will not condemn every one for a hypocrite that suspects, yea, or charges himself with hypocrisy. Holy David thought his heart was not right with

God, after that great slip of his in the matter of Uriah; and therefore he begs of God to renew a right spirit within him: his integrity was indeed wounded, and, as he thought, destroyed by that fall. Holy Mr. Bradford so vehemently doubted the sincerity of his heart, that he subscribed some of his letters, "John Bradford the hypocrite; a very painted sepulchre:" and yet, in so saying, he utterly misjudged the state and temper of his own soul.

SECT. II.—Well then, let not the upright be unjust to themselves in censuring their own hearts. They are bad enough, but let us not make them worse than they are, but thankfully own and acknowledge the least degrees of grace and integrity in them; and possibly our uprightness might be sooner discovered to us, if, in a due composure of spirit, we would sit down and attend to the true answers of our own hearts to such questions as these are:—

Quest. 1. Do I make the approbation of God, or the applause of men, the very end and main design of my religious performances? according to 1 Thess. ii. 4. Col. iii. 23. Will the acceptance of my duties with men satisfy me, whether God accept my duties and person or not?

Quest. 2. Is it the reproach and shame that attends sin at present, and the danger and misery that will follow it hereafter, that restrains me from the commission of it? or is it the fear of God in my soul, and the hatred I bear to it as it is sin? according to Psalm xix. 12. and Psalm cxix. 113.

Quest. 3. Can I truly and heartily rejoice to see God's work carried on in the world, and his glory promoted, by other hands, though I have no share in the credit and honour of it, as Paul did? Phil. i. 18.

Quest. 4. Is there no duty in religion so full of difficulty and self-denial, but I desire to comply with it? And is all the holy and good will of God acceptable to my soul, though I cannot rise up with like readiness to the performance of all duties? according to that pattern in Psalm cxix. 6.

Quest. 5. Am I sincerely resolved to follow Christ and holiness at all seasons, however the aspects of the times may be towards religion? or do I carry myself so warily and covertly as to shun all hazards for religion, having a secret reserve in my heart to launch out no further than I may return with safety, contrary to the practice and resolution of upright souls? Psalm cxvi. 3, 4. Psalm xliv. 18, 19. Rev. xxii. 14.

Quest. 6. Do I make no conscience of committing secret sins, or neglecting secret duties? or am I conscientious both in the one and the other? according to the rules and patterns of integrity in Matt. vi. 5, 6. Psalm xix. 12—14.

A few such questions solemnly propounded to our own hearts in a calm and serious hour, would sound them, and discover much of their sincerity towards the Lord.

SECT. III.—And as upright hearts are too apt to apply to themselves the threats and miseries of hypocrites, so hypocrites, on the contrary, are as apt to catch hold of the promises and privileges pertaining to believers. To detect therefore the soul-damning mistakes of such deceived souls, O that these following rules might be studied, and faithfully applied to their conviction and recovery!

Rule 1. It is not enough to clear a man from hypocrisy, that he knows not himself to be a hypo-

crite. All hypocrites are not designing hypocrites; they deceive themselves as well as others: "Many will say to me in that day, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name?" Hell will be a surprisal to multitudes of professors. A man may live and die in a blind, ungrounded confidence of his safe condition, and not fear his ruin till he begins to feel it.

Rule 2. Zeal and forwardness in the cause of God, and for the reformation of his worship, will not clear a man from the danger of hypocrisy. Jehu was a zealous reformer, and yet but a painted sepulchre. In the year 1549, reformation grew so much in reputation, even among the nobles and gentry in Germany, that many of them caused these five letters, *V. D. M. I. Æ.* being the initial letters of these words, "*Verbum Domini manet in æternum*," that is, "The word of the Lord abideth for ever," to be wrought, or embroidered, or set in plates, some upon their cloaks, and others upon the sleeves of their garments; to show to all the world, that, forsaking all popish traditions, they would now cleave to the pure doctrine and discipline of the eternal Word. And no doubt they would have been as good as their word, if what was embroidered on their cloaks had been engraven on their hearts; but, "Come, see my zeal," mars all.

Rule 3. It is no sufficient evidence of a man's own integrity, that he hates hypocrisy in another; for, as one proud man may hate another, and he who is covetous himself will be apt to censure another for being so; as lusts may be contrary to one another, as well as all of them contrary to grace; so may a hypocrite loathe that in another, which yet he allows

in himself: nay, it is the policy of some to declaim against the hypocrisy of others, thereby to hide their own. Hypocrites are none of the most modest censurers of others, Psalm xxxv. 16. A salt jest seasoneth their meat.

Rule 4. The mere performance of private duties will not clear a man from hypocrisy. The influence of education, or support of reputation, or the impulse of a convinced conscience, may induce a man to it; and yet all this while his heart may not be carried thither with hungry and thirsty desires after God. It is not the matter of any duty that distinguishes the sound and unsound professor; but the motives, designs, and ends of the soul in them.

Rule 5. The character you have among Christians for sincerity, will not be sufficient to clear you from the danger of hypocrisy. Christ tells the angel of Sardis, "Thou hast a name that thou livest, and art dead." The fall of Hymeneus and Philetus could never have shaken the faith of the saints as it did, had they not had great credit in the church, and been men of renown for piety among them.

Rule 6. Your respects and love to them that are the sincere and upright servants of God, will not clear you from the danger of being hypocrites yourselves; for the bare loving of a Christian is not evidential of a man's own Christianity, except he love him, as he is a Christian, or as he belongs to Christ; and so his sincerity becomes the attractive of your affection. There are a thousand by-considerations and respects that may kindle a man's love to the saints, besides their integrity.

SECT. IV.—Well then, if thou wouldst indeed see

the unsoundness of thy own heart, propound such heart-sounding questions as these to thyself:—

Quest. 1. Do I engage my heart to approach unto God in the course of my duties? or do I go the round of duties, taking no heed to my heart in them? If so, compare this symptom of thy hypocrisy with that in 2 Kings x. 31. and that in Ezek. xx. 31, 32.

Quest. 2. Am I not swayed and moved by self-interest and carnal respects in the ways of religion, the accommodation of some worldly interest, or the getting a name and reputation of godliness? If so, how apparently do the same symptoms of hypocrisy appear upon my soul, which did upon Judas, John xii. 6.; and on Jehu, 2 Kings x. 15, 16.

Quest. 3. Have I not some secret reserves in my heart, notwithstanding that face and appearance of zeal which I put on? Certainly, if there be any sin that I cannot part with, any suffering for Christ which I resolve against in my heart, I am not his disciple; my heart is not right with God, the Searcher of hearts himself being a Judge.

Quest. 4. What conscience do I make of secret sins? Do I mourn for a vain heart, wandering thoughts, spiritual deadness? And do I conscientiously abstain from the practice of secret sins, when there is no danger of discovery, no fear of forfeiting my reputation by them? Is it God's eye, or man's, that awes me from the commission of sin? Certainly, if I allow myself in secret sins, I am not of the number of God's upright people, whose spirits are of a contrary temper to mine, Psalm cxix. 113.; Psalm cxii. 1, 2.

SECT. V.—I will shut up all with five or six con-

cluding counsels (which the Lord impress upon the heart of him that writes, and those that shall read them !) to preserve and antidote the soul against the dangerous insinuation and leaven of hypocrisy.

Counsel 1. Entreat the Lord, night and day, for a renewed and right spirit. All the helps and directions in the world will not antidote and preserve you from hypocrisy : nothing will be found able to keep you right, till sanctification has first set you right : “ I will put my Spirit within you ; and cause you to walk in my statutes.” A bowl may keep by a strait line, so long as the impressed force of the hand that delivered it remains strong upon it ; but as that wears off, so its motion fails, and its own bias sways and turns it. A fright of conscience, a pang of warm affection, or the influence of some great example, or a good education, may affect an unrenewed soul, and push it on in the way of salvation for a season ; but the heart, so influenced, must and will return to its own natural course again. And I think there wants nothing but time or a suitable temptation, to discover the true temper of many a professor’s spirit. Pray, therefore, as that holy man did in Psalm cxix. 80. “ Let my heart be sound in thy statutes, that I be not ashamed.”

Counsel 2. Always suspect and examine your ends in what you do. Sincerity and hypocrisy lie much in your ends and designs ; as they are, so are you. The intentions of the heart lie deep. A man may do the same action to a holy end, and his person and service be accepted with God ; which another doing for a corrupt end, it may be reckoned his sin, and both his person and service be abhorred by the

Lord. We find two men riding in one chariot, and both of them concerned in the same expedition, Jehu the son of Nimshi, and Jonadab the son of Rechab, 2 Kings x. 15, 23.; but though the work they engaged in was one and the same, yet the different ends they aimed at made the same action an excellent duty in Jonadab, and an act of vile hypocrisy in Jehu. It was the saying of a good man, when commended for a good action, "The work indeed is good, but I suspect the motive of it. Self-ends are creeping and insinuating things into the best actions."

Counsel 3. Stir up yourselves with the daily fears of the sin that is in hypocrisy, and the misery that will follow it. Look upon it as the most odious sin in the eyes of God and men. To want holiness is bad enough, but to dissimulate and pretend it when we have it not, is double impiety. To make religion, the most glorious thing in the world, a mere stirrup to preferment, and a covert to wickedness, O how vile a thing is this! God made Christ a sacrifice for sin, and the hypocrite will make him a cloak for sin.

And as to the punishments that follow it, they are suitable to the nature of the sin; for as hypocrisy is out of measure sinful, so the reward and punishment of it will be out of measure dreadful. "He shall cut him asunder, and appoint him his portion with hypocrites; there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth," Matt. xxiv. 51.

Counsel 4. Be daily at work in the mortification of those lusts that breed hypocrisy. It is plain, without much sifting, that pride, vain-glory, self-love, and a worldly heart, are the seeds out of which this

cursed plant springs up in the souls of men. Dig but to the root, you will certainly find these things there; and till the Lord helps you to kill and mortify these, hypocrisy will spring up in all your duties to God, and in all your converses with men.

Counsel 5. Attend the native voice of your own consciences in the day of sickness, fear or trouble, and take special notice of its checks or upbraidings, which, like a stitch in your side, will gird at such times. Beware of that evil which conscience brands and marks at such times, whether it be your living in the practice of some secret sin, or in the neglect of some known duty. These frights of conscience mark out the corruption, wherein your danger mostly lies.

Counsel 6. Let all that profess religion be uniform and steady in the profession and practice of it, without politic reserves and by-ends. O take heed of this Laodicean neutrality and indifferency which Christ hates! Be sure your ground be good, and then be sure you stand your ground. The religion of time-servers is but hypocrisy. They have sluices in their consciences which they can open or shut as occasion requires. Every fox will at least have two holes to his den, that if one be stopped, he may escape at the other. The hypocrite poises himself so evenly in a mediocrity, that, as it is said of Baldwin, "Let Antony win, let Augustus win, all is one;" so let Christ win, or let Antichrist win, he hopes to make every wind that can blow serviceable to waft him to the port of his own interest.

The hypocrite has always more of the moon than of the sun, little light, many spots, and frequent

changes. It is easier to him to bow to the cross, than to bear the cross; to sin, than to suffer.

Our own history tells us of a poor simple woman who lived both in the reign of Queen Mary and Queen Elizabeth, and would constantly say her prayers both in Latin and English, that she might be sure to please one side or the other; and "Let God," said she, "take which likes him best." What is noted as an act of ridiculous simplicity in her, the time-serving hypocrite accounts a point of deep policy in himself.

The times under Dioclesian were Pagan; under Constantine, Christian; under Constantius, Arian; under Julian, apostate; and under Jovian, Christian again; and all this within the space of seventy years, the age of one man. O what shifting and shuffling was there among the men of that generation! The changes of weather show the unsoundness of men's bodies, and the changes of times the unsoundness of their souls.

Christian, if ever thou wilt manifest and maintain thine integrity, be a man but of one design, and be sure that be an honest and good design, to secure heaven, whatever becomes of earth; to hold fast integrity, whatever thou art forced to let go for its sake. Take heed of pious frauds. Certainly it was the devil that first married these two words together; for they never did nor can agree betwixt themselves, nor was ever such a marriage made in heaven.

Never study to model religion, and the exercises thereof, in a consistency with or subserviency to your fleshly interests. If your religion be but a mock religion, your reward shall be but a mock heaven, that is, a real hell.

O the vanity and inutility of these projects and designs ! Men strive to cast themselves into such modes, and stint themselves to such measures of religion, as they think will best promote or secure their earthly interests : but it often falls out, contrary to their expectation, that their deep policies are ridiculous follies ; they become the grief and shame of their friends, and the scorn and song of their enemies. And often it fares with them, as it did with him who placed himself in the middle of the table, where he could neither reach the dish above him, nor that below him ; and, which is the very best of it, if earthly interest be accommodated by sinful neutrality, and a Laodicean indifferency in religion, yet no good man should once feel a temptation to embrace it, except he think what is wanting in the sweetness of his sleep may be fully recompensed to him by the stateliness of his bed, and richer furniture of his chamber ; I mean, that a fuller and higher condition in the world, can make him amends for the loss of his inward peace, and the quiet repose of a good conscience. These by-ends and self-interests are the little passages through which hypocrisy creeps in upon the professors of religion.

O let this be your rejoicing, which was Paul's, "the testimony of your conscience, that in simplicity and godly sincerity, not with fleshly wisdom, but by the grace of God, you have had your conversation in the world." Let that be your daily prayer and cry to heaven, which was David's, "Let integrity and uprightness preserve me, for I wait on thee."

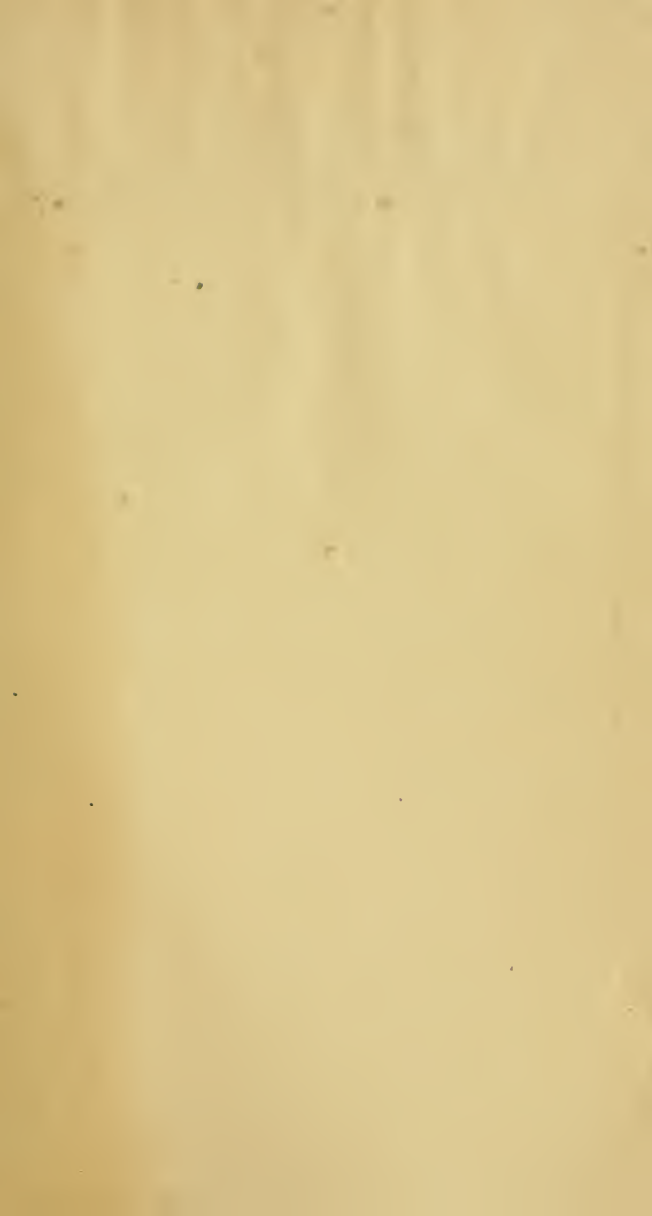
Counsel 7. Keep your hearts day and night under the awe of God's all-seeing eye. Remember that

he beholds all your ways, and ponders all your thoughts. How covertly soever hypocrisy may be carried for a time, all must, and will out at last, Luke xii. 3. Secresy is the main inducement to hypocrisy: but it will fall out with the hypocrite, as it did with Ottocar the king of Bohemia; he refused to do homage to Rodolphus the emperor, till at last, chastised with war, he was content to do him homage privately in a tent; but the tent was so contrived by the emperor's servants, that by drawing one cord, it was taken all away; and so Ottocar was presented on his knees doing homage, in view of three armies.

Reader, awe thy heart with God's eye; know that he will bring every secret thing into judgment. Thus did Job, and it preserved him, Job xxxi. 1—4. Thus did David, and it preserved him, Psalm xviii. 21—23. Thus do thou also, and it will preserve thee blameless and without guile to the day of Christ.

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